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The Street Spotters' Weird Hunt;

Or, THE ANGEL of the DOCKS.

By MARCUS H. WARING.



ONE OF THE TWO GAVE A SUDDEN START AND LOOKED OFF OVER THE WATER IN AN EXCITED WAY.

The Street Spotters' Weird Hunt;

OR,

THE ANGEL OF THE DOCKS.

A Mystery of the Dead and Living Riddle.

BY MARCUS H. WARING,

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CHAPTER I.

THE TRAGEDY ON THE WATER.

ALARM often follows a feeling of careless ease, and it was to be so with the occupants of the little harbor sail-boat that was crossing New York Bay. Their minds were on common-place matters, but in their track, buoyed up and drifted about by the waters, there was a mystery and the trail of a tragedy.

One of the two gave a sudden start and looked off over the water in an excited way.

"What now, James, asked his companion of at the tiller.

"Look yonder, Stumps!"

"I see nothin'. W'ot is it!"

"Look again!"

Stumps obeyed, rising from his seat, and this time, not in vain. The barely distinguishable burden borne by the water had turned under its touch, and the white face of a young woman seemed to return their startled gaze. One moment it was visible; then it disappeared.

"Drowned!" murmured Stumps, in a sympathetic voice.

"Or can she be alive? Look!"

A hand was raised from the water, and it seemed for a moment that the unfortunate was beckoning to them, but that thought soon vanished. The tide was running rapidly out, and its precious burden could not float placidly, but it was clear that the unknown was done with this life.

"Here's a tragedy or a mystery, Jim Royal," the startled Stumps added. "It's our duty to pick up that remnant o' humanity."

"Right, and we are going to do it. Quick! let's get the boat about before we lose sight of her."

There was no danger of the water-waif being lost. It kept on the surface, and when the boat had been brought up beside it, there was nothing to do but lift the body into the craft. Then they sat, staring in silence at the dead.

The drowned woman was young; evidently not more than twenty; and Jim felt sure she had been very pretty before the water had claimed its burden.

"No common person," Stumps declared mournfully. "Her clothes are fine and costly; an' I reckon they are right in the pink o' style, though I ain't posted on that line."

"She never has done hard work. Her hands are soft, well shaped and well cared for."

"A right charmin' young female, once, an' mighty unfortunate. How d'ye s'pose she come ter this end?"

"Who know?"

"There's a city up there," observed Stumps, pointing to New York, "that is the grandest in the New World; yet, James, there is things done there that makes the blood chill when we think of it. It's many a long mile from the Battery ter High Bridge, an' crime goes on there silently but surely like the waters of North River. Some on the evil done never is found out; some comes ter light when a poor soul is found drowned, so."

Stumps was not usually sentimental, but sight of the fair young woman had moved him to a marked degree. He was interrupted by an exclamation from Jim.

"Look, Stumps! See the marks on her neck! Fingers have been there—fingers contracted until the nails have left their cruel, tell-tale scar. This was no suicide, no accidental death by drowning. Stumps, it was murder! cool, deliberate, devilish murder!"

The speaker had grown excited, and he pointed to the evidence mentioned, while dismay and indignation were depicted in his strong young face.

There was silence for several moments, but the mind of each was busy. Both read a good deal in the visible sign of violence offered, and imagined how the unfortunate had been thrown into the East River from a pier or a vessel.

These two were old acquaintances with the streets and waters of New York. One had been born in the city, and always had lived there.

The other was not in the habit of telling his history, but he lived in New York and knew the great city thoroughly.

Jim Royal was twenty years old—a stout, manly youth, whose plain, resolute face was indicative of honor, alertness and good humor.

Stumps had left the best half of his life behind him, and gray hairs were beginning to appear in his shaggy locks. He was dressed even more plainly and coarsely than his companion. The most noticeable thing about him was a wooden leg. A part of the member provided by Nature had been lost in some accident, and the substitute was one which suggested a lack of cash, it being of the most humble pattern.

"Have you noticed in the papers an account of any missing woman?" Jim asked, breaking the silence.

"Don't recollect ez I have."

"This girl must have lost her life several days ago."

"Yes, that is evident."

"Here is a ring on her finger which may lead to her identification. It is a peculiar one. It represents two crossed arrows, with a diamond at each corner and one where they cross. A very delicate and ingenious piece of work."

"Two crossed arrows?" Stumps cried, as if in astonishment.

"Yes."

"Let me see."

He knelt down and looked at the ring, and then a singular expression appeared on his rough face.

"Great heavens!" he exclaimed, excitedly.

"What now?"

"I've seen that ring afore!"

"You have? Where? When?"

Stumps was regarding the ring intently, and did not heed the question. He was startled and deeply troubled, as his manner indicated. Finally he turned his gaze upon the still face of the wearer of the ring.

"Can it be?" he murmured.

Jim Royal was eager to know the facts of the new discovery, but he remained silent until, finally, his companion turned his gaze from the dead to the living.

"James," he remarked, seriously, "I seen that ring a good twenty year ago. I was younger then than I be now, an' I had two good legs. I was a sailor on a West Injy vessel, under old Cap'n Block. He had a daughter, the cap'n did, who always sailed with him. Her name was Elnora. Many's the time I've seen that ring on her hand, an' as we all loved her, an' she wa'n't noways proud, she was a great favorite. Once, she took the ring off an' showed it ter me, an' she said it was her dead mother's gift to her, an' how she never would part from it."

"Where is she now?"

"That's w'ot I don't know. I left my ship ter go as mate on another, an' never seen her or Cap'n Block ag'in. I heerd, soon after, that he died, but w'ot become o' her I don't know."

"Where did they live?"

"On the vessel. I hev a vague idee that the old cap'n owned a house som'ers over by the Sound, but where, I don't know. The ship was their home. What's worse, I don't know of a relative they had."

"But the owners of the vessel: can't they be found? Perhaps they would know about Elnora Block."

"Mebbe. I don't know of they're still in business, but we kin see."

"But this cannot be Elnora."

"No; oh! no; she would be forty years old now. It ain't that, but, how came this poor gal by the ring? Elnora said she never would part with it, an' she would keep her word. W'ot I'm afeerd of is—"

"What?"

"That this is her daughter!"

"Whom did she marry?"

"That's w'ot I don't know. She wa'n't married w'en I seen her last, an' I've never heerd from her sence. But, Jeems, she wouldn't let that ring go inter nobody else's hands but one o' the family, an' I'm afeerd this is her child. The hair an' eyes are a good bit like Miss Elnora's, an' you see she could hev a daughter o' this age."

"It would be strange if that was the fact."

"'T would be awful! Think o' this poor thing meetin' with voylence from some enemy in the city, an' then bein' throwed into the river like a dead cat! It was an awful thing ter do. An' mebbe Elnora's blood run in this girl's veins. Think of it!"

"Stumps, we must learn who this girl was."

"Yes, yes; we'll put the perleece right on the track."

"Why not take the trail ourselves? You and I, and Bobby Blossom, have done detective work

before as the Spotter Trio. Now, if you think this was Elnora Block's daughter—"

"I see! Yes, I'd be willin' ter do my best—ter work fer years, ef I could help one o' her kin. We'll do it, Jeems; we'll do it! Of course the myst'ry may be settled up, first off, but I can't get red o' the feelin' that a good deal lays back o' this. An' ef it was her child—what then?"

"Then, for the mother's sake, you want to down the guilty and bring them to punishment."

"I do, I do!" Stumps declared, vehemently.

"I'm with you; we'll go into the work with a will. Now, let us get under way again, and return to New York."

The position of the boat at that moment was below Governor's Island, and nearer to Brooklyn than New York, but they did not think of taking the water-waif anywhere except to the latter city. They had been on their way to visit a friend on the Long Island shore when the discovery was made, and it was not a sacrifice of any moment to change their plans.

They were soon on their way to the metropolis, but it occurred to Jim Royal that they ought to have all possible evidence before letting the waif go out of their hands. They searched her pockets, but failed to find a scrap of paper, or anything else, therein.

The ring was the one means of identification further than the body and clothing.

"I'm afraid it won't be no easy job ter get at the mystery, ef some friend don't show up, first off," remarked Stumps. "From w'ot I know o' the natural course of events I kinder believe the body come down the East River. Now, nobody lives nigh it who would be likely ter dress like this, an' wear diamonds, an' there may hev been a long journey afore the murderers got to the river. Looks dubious, but I'm goin' ter know whether this was Elnora Block's child."

"Good! I'm with you, and so will Bobby Blossom be."

"That ain't no mean crowd in a fight, we ain't. Yes; we'll hunt the evil-doers down. There's too much of it in New York, an' ev'ry honest person ought ter be ready ter do his share ter block them."

"And we agree to follow this case to the end?"

"Yes."

"Our pledge is given; our word shall be kept."

CHAPTER II.

THE STRANGE VISITOR TO THE PIER.

It was four hours later. Darkness had fallen, and the rush of business hours had ceased. A boy of about fifteen years of age approached a house which stood near the East River, but, finding no one visible, strolled down on one of the piers. The scene was one always of interest, and though he had been there many times before, he felt that the maritime picture vouchsafed him was worth surveying again.

He went to the extreme end of the pier. The river flowing calmly past, the many lights glittered, and he nodded his satisfaction.

"New York is good enough fer me! This one, an' that one, has ter run off ter Europe, an' Californy, an' Boston, an' other foreign places, but old Gotham jest erbout fills the apple o' Bobby Blossom's eye."

Thus he spoke aloud. If anybody had asked who Bobby Blossom was he would have answered that it was himself, but no one spoke. To all appearance he was alone.

Several minutes passed, and then he heard a sound behind him. He turned quickly, but carelessly, thinking a friend had put in an appearance, and then stood mute with surprise.

He was no longer sole occupant of the pier, but the latest comer was not the man he had expected. It was no man; it was a woman. In the dim light he could see but little more, but he believed she was young. Certainly, she had a slender, trim-looking figure.

"Say, w'ot in time is she doin'?" Bobby muttered.

Sure enough, her movements were unusual and eccentric. She stood close to the southern side of the pier, bending over and gazing into the black expanse where the river rolled its waters along the water-front.

"Bet yer a dollar she's goin' ter commit suicide!" added Bobby, as though challenging contradiction; and he was about to start forward and prevent an act so rash, when she straightened up.

She changed her position by a few feet, and then repeated her act of bending over the water.

A queer sensation came over the watcher. She moved with the lightness of a feather; she

seemed to float, rather than walk; and her attire waved and fluttered in the breeze like cobwebs blown about.

Dark was her costume, yet a superstitious fear came over Bobby Blossom.

"Great 'skeeters! w'ot ef it's a ghost?" he thought.

Many and strange stories had he heard of disembodied spirits, and though he never had seen one himself, he began to think such things might be. Why should any live woman be on the pier at that hour, staring at the black waters? And how could any woman in the flesh move so airily?

It was something of a shock to believe he was in such company, but he was of an investigating bent of mind, and a new idea came to him.

"B'mighty! I'll interview the spook, an' ef I git any interestin' p'int on Ghostland, I'll write it up fer one o' the newspapers. It'd be an awful 'beat' on the other fellers, an' it'd make my repertation. Here goes fer Miss G-o-a-s-t, Ghost!"

He advanced with all the confidence he could summon, and broke the silence with the off-hand remark:

"Fine evenin', mum!"

The supposed ghost turned slowly, showing no surprise, but said nothing.

"Out fer a promenade?" Bobby added, blandly.

Still she was silent, but, undiscouraged, he went on:

"How's Mr. Ghost, an' Mrs. Ghost, an' the little Ghostesses?"

Then the unknown broke the silence, and explained in a low and plaintive voice:

"I was looking to see where I was drowned!"

"Eh?" cried Bobby, startled.

"I was drowned somewhere near here!"

"Great 'skeeters! you don't say so, mum!"

"Have you seen my body?"

"Me! No, I ain't; an' I don't want ter. Drowned folks are awful uncomfor'ble things ter hev 'round. But," young Mr. Blossom added, in an awe-struck voice, "do you really mean ter say you are dead?"

"I must be, for I looked down and saw my face floating in the water. I was frightened, and I fainted; and when I came to, I had drifted away. I have hunted since, but I can't find my body."

"Mad as an insane asylum!" thought the boy.

"I wish you'd look in the water and see if you can see anything. Your eyes may be better than mine."

"I'll do it."

Bobby's faint attack of belief in ghosts had vanished, but, nevertheless, the plaintive manner of this wanderer of the night gave him an uncomfortable, "creepy" feeling. He wished to humor her, and he imitated her example and looked long and earnestly into the water. He saw nothing unusual, and finally told her so.

"It is strange," she murmured.

"How did it all happen, mum?"

"I don't know. There has been trouble, and things are dreadfully mixed up. I can't explain what I don't know, but I hope to know all some time, and I am going to watch here until I do."

"So you've come before?"

"Every night!"

"A-lookin' fer a body?"

"Yes. I would not care so much about it, but I had on a ring, at the time, which is valuable. It had five diamonds, but I don't care so much for that; it is because the ring was my mother's. It was made in imitation of two crossed arrows, with the diamonds set in."

The directness of this explanation puzzled Bobby more than ever. If this person was deranged, she was not like any other person of the kind he ever had seen. Her manner was very gentle and touching, and, having gained partial view of her face, he saw that it was very refined and intelligent. She did not seem to be more than a girl in years. He doubted if she was twenty-one.

"Perhaps a perleeceman could help ye," he suggested.

"No, no, I don't want to see one."

"Why not?"

"I'm afraid of them," she replied, shivering.

"W'ot hev ye done out o' the way?"

"Nothing. Do you think I have?"

"Ter tell the truth, I don't. I ain't known you long, but you don't strike me as one o' that kind. Wher'bouts do you live?"

"Over there, somewhere," and she made a gesture which took in one-third of the city.

"What street?"

"I don't remember."

She sighed and added:

"I forget things that I used to remember. There is some trouble, and I can't tell what it is. I know I ought to find that ring, though, and must keep on searching until I do. It is weary work, and sometimes my courage fails. I have come here so often! But, there is no use of looking to-night, and I will go home. I am very much obliged to you for looking, and helping me, and I hope I can pay you for it some time. But, now, I'll go home."

"You jest wait a fraction, mum. I know a man that is as wise as sixteen like me, an' ef anybody kin give you a straight tip, he can. He's honest, too, an' never throwed anybody down. You come this way, an' I'll see him."

Bobby spoke coaxingly, but he had an object in view. Feeling that some one ought to care for a young woman so helpless, he intended to summon his friend, Pete Tiernan, a 'longshoreman' who lived in the house he had looked at when he came down to the pier, and have that person take charge of affairs.

She did not object, and they went toward the house, but just before they reached it Tiernan, himself, came out and moved toward them.

"That's him," Bobby explained.

"Oh! I know that gentleman."

"Sure?" the 'longshoreman' readily agreed.

"So it's yerself is out the noight, leddy?"

His manner was kind and consoling, but Bobby Blossom did not fail to see there was something more; something almost like reverence.

"I have been as unfortunate as ever."

"I'm right sorry for yez, leddy."

She looked away at vacancy, and Bobby sidled up to the longshoreman.

"Say, she ain't fit ter care fer herself. What be we goin' ter do?"

"Hush!" returned Tiernan, quickly. "Don't be after sayin' a worrud; let her have her own way."

The boy yielded. If Tiernan knew her, it was quite another matter.

The 'longshoreman' waited with a subdued air, but the young woman suddenly aroused.

"I will go now," she observed, "but I shall come again. I hope you will keep watch, and help me if you can."

"Sure, an' I will, leddy."

She said good-night in her peculiarly gentle and attractive voice, and then turned and walked quickly away. Again her lightness of foot was noticeable; she seemed to float, rather than walk. When she had disappeared in a cross-street Bobby impulsively broke the silence:

"Say, Peter, who is she?"

"The Angel of the Docks!"

"Eh?"

"We call her the Angel of the Docks, an' that's the only name we know fer her. Who she is, an' where she lives, we niver knew. I m'ane, me an' the wife, an' Tim Brogan."

"How long hev you known her?"

"Less than a w'ake."

"Great 'skeeters! I s'posed she was an old 'quaintance, or I wouldn't 'a' been so ready ter vote she should go off. Peter, it ain't safe; she'll come ter harm. Le's chase her an'—"

"No; I think she's safe. Annyhow, not a finger would I be after layin' on her, ter upset her plans. It ain't all a figger-ave speech whin we call her the Angel of the Docks. We do be thinkin' she's not loike other folks!"

Bobby's curiosity was thoroughly aroused.

"How'd ye make her 'quaintance?"

"Well, Bobby, it was loike this: Friday noight ave last week, at about half-past ten ave the clock, me wife an' I was a-settin' in the house whin we heard a woman scream out on the pier, an' a terrible creepy scream it was. Now, the wife is always under the imprisonment that there are demons, an' banshees, an' warlocks, an' ghosts, an' Providence only knows what, waitin' ter gobble up woman-koind, so she hustled me out ave the house lively, ter save the woman that screamed."

"I towld her since that she gave no thought ter the fact that the demons an' banshees moight gobble me, but she said I was that homely that I'd scare all the banshees and evil spirits till they'd run loike ter break their necks, rather than face me."

"Well, out on the pier, close to the edge, I found a girl in a dead faint, an' I called the wife, an' we give her whisky within, an' water without, till she came around."

"The poor cr'ature was that scared that she didn't sence things at first, an' she kept a-mutterin': 'The face in the water—the face in the water!' But, when we would have carried her inter the house she started up, an' she said 'No!'"

"That's the way we met her, an' though she was so frightened at first, she straightway be-

gan to talk in the same quiet, gentle way you hev heard her. But niver a word would she explain, an' she soon hurried away."

"Begorra, I didn't know what ter make ave her, an' I said so, but the wife spoke out an' says:

"'Sure, it was an angel!'"

"Now, I didn't take ter this idea, at first, for I thought an angel would not swoon'd an' take on as she did at first, but whin I towld Tim Brogan about it, he said such things had been seen before, an' mebbe she would be after comin' again."

"So that next noight we all watched, an' the young woman came. This toime she talked about fallin' inter the water, an' said she was drowned an' floatin' there still, an' the wife an' Tim just shook until their knees rattled together loike bones in a minstrel show."

"To make a long story short she comes ivery noight, an' talks about the face in the water, an' the loike ave that—mebbe you heard her—an' we call her the Angel of the Docks."

"I'm not that wise to tell yez just what she is. The wife an' Tim stick ter the old oidea, but I fancy she's a poor cr'ature who has met with sore trouble an' isn't just roight up aloft."

"But she deserves to be called an angel, fer a woman more gentle, an' kind, an' gracious, an' sweet, I niver saw!"

Mr. Tiernan spoke with considerable enthusiasm, but it was tempered with the old trace of reverence.

"Wal, what d'ye make o' her, anyhow?" Bobby asked.

"Sure, the wife an' Tim may be right."

"But spirits—angels—don't faint."

"I towld the wife that, an' she asked me how I knew. 'Sure,' says she, 'you niver saw an angel before an' I do be thinkin' you'll never go where you'll see wan ag'in!'"

And the 'longshoreman' shook his head soberly at the recollection.

CHAPTER III.

A GRAPPLE FOR LIFE.

BOBBY saw that, in spite of the dictates of his own reason, Tiernan was not far from agreeing with his wife and Tim Brogan on the point that the Angel of the Docks was of more than natural being. Unknown to Bobby, however, there was a great struggle in Peter's mind; he constantly was dwelling upon the conundrum: Was a real angel subject to fainting-spells, and was it substantial enough to be like human beings to the touch of a human being's hand?

This was contrary to Peter's understanding of angels, but Mrs. Tiernan's positive statement on that point staggered him. All things were possible with angels, she said.

Bobby Blossom asked more questions, but, seeing he was not likely to get anything of importance, he left the pier and hastened away.

Regarding his late experience as remarkable, he was eager to communicate it to certain intimate friends of his—friends who had been his associates in solving mysteries before, and who, he thought possible, might be willing to grapple with this new complication.

These friends he found in a house on West Twelfth street, where one of them had a room. He used due diligence in getting there, and finally burst in upon them. They were no strangers in this revelation, being, in brief, Jim Royal, and one-legged Stumps.

Bobby dashed his cap down on the floor.

"Hi! fellers, w'ot d'ye guess I've run onter?" he cried.

"A lamp-post," Jim gravely suggested.

"Come off! I've got on track of a full-blown mystery, an' I hev a sneakin' idee we kin do some detective work on it. I ain't sure it would pan out over ninety cents ter the dollar, but we want ter keep our hands in, in the detective line, and let New York see that Jim Royal & Co. are still in harness as the Spotter Trio!"

"Take breath, Bobby, and then state what has happened," Jim advised.

The boy obeyed, and gave the history of the Angel of the Docks, as far as he knew it. In his haste he omitted some particulars, and, though he spoke of the ring referred to by the Angel, he did not describe it.

When he made it evident, if the strange girl's word was believed, that some one had been drowned by the pier, Jim and Stumps exchanged glances and manifested an interest very pleasant to the narrator.

"Now, then, w'ot d'ye think o' that?" he asked in conclusion.

"We could tell better if we knew the girl's name."

"That's w'ot we must find out."

"I wish," observed Stumps, "that you had thought ter ask her fer a description o' that ring she spoke of."

"I didn't need ter. She told me all about it. She said it was made in imitation o' two crossed arrows, with five diamonds set in."

"Oh!"

Stumps uttered the exclamation in a deep key, while again Jim regarded him in wonder. Bobby had accurately described the ring found on the drowned girl's finger.

"This is strange!" Jim commented.

"That's wot I thought," Bobby returned.

"But you don't know all."

"I don't? Do you? Ef you do, let a feller in."

Jim told how he and Stumps had found the body of the girl in the bay, brought it to New York and turned it over to the police. It was in the custody of the latter when the finders left, and the score of persons who had been to see it, had failed to recognize the drowned girl.

The notion of the Angel of the Docks that some one had been drowned might have been passed over as a delusion, or, if a fact, as in no way relating to the tragedy of the bay, had it not been for her description of the ring.

That was not to be overlooked, and it at once established the fact that she had knowledge of the ornament found on the dead girl's finger.

The rings were one and the same, but what was the history of that ring?

The Angel of the Docks might not be just right, mentally, but she was not talking all at random.

"But I don't b'lieve it's her who is drowned, ef she does say so," persisted Bobby.

"You can maintain that position safely, my friend. When a person is dead she goes abroad on the earth no more. If she is worried about her body she don't let human beings know it. There are two girls in this mystery, and we haven't the key to the riddle yet. We will try to get it, though."

"An' we'll succeed," Bobby affirmed. "They call you 'Lucky' Jim Royal, an' you're sure ter 'get there,' every time. We'll see the Angel, ef we hev ter hunt a month, an' then we'll grapple with the case, git the facts, win glory an' wade fetlock deep in fame. Whoop'er up, Hannah Maria!"

Robert Blossom was of a nature somewhat frivolous, and his thoughts at this stage of affairs were not outside his usual enthusiastic vein, but it was different with Jim and Stumps.

They had been deeply affected by the discovery in the bay, and the possibility that the drowned girl might be the daughter of Elnora Block troubled and saddened Stumps.

The matter was discussed in all its bearings, and the three friends agreed to do all they could to solve the mystery, unless this was at once done by the police. Probably the daily papers would have the story of the finding of the body, and some friend might come forward and identify her at once.

"An' then, ag'in, they may not," added Stumps. "We read almost ev'ry week of some poor unfortunite, dead by violence, accident or suicide, who is buried without bein' identified, an' who shall say how many are kept in the grasp of the two great rivers that wash the front of our city, an' carried out ter sea? The world never knows one-half o' the secrets, the sufferin's an' the tragedies o' Gotham, I'm thinkin'."

The hour was growing late, and Mr. Stumps soon left his friends and started homeward. He lived on a humble street down below Jefferson Market, and in that direction he went, his wooden leg thumping on the sidewalk in regular beats.

When he came out of Jim's house he noticed a man standing on the opposite side of the street. The manner of this person was careless and unconcerned, and Stumps had no reason to suppose he need be interested. But he had gone only a couple of blocks when he noticed that some one was following behind him.

Even at a late hour such a thing was not uncommon in New York, for when two persons travel the same course one must be in advance and the other in the rear, and he of the wooden leg would have given the fact only passing notice had he not discovered that the rear guard was the same man who had been standing still a little before.

"Ef he's a highwayman," thought Stumps, with a grim smile, "he won't git enough out o' me ter pay fer usin' slung-shot or sand-bag. Guess he will see that, an' let the old wooden-legged trumper alone."

The pursuer, if such he was, did not try to close up, and Stumps reached his boarding-house and entered without adventure.

He was soon in his room, and, unstrapping his false leg, he went to bed.

Sleep came as a guest shortly after.

The little clock on the mantel ticked on for an hour, but Stumps heard it not. Its voice was low and modest, too, and it was not that which finally aroused him.

Something else did.

He awoke with that vague feeling, by no means uncommon to sleepers, that something was wrong. He lay without stirring, and without real alarm, but wondered absently what made the feeling. Was it a dream, now forgotten?

Hark!

What was that sound?

The movement of something, surely, and, moreover, something that seemed to be in the room. Was it a cat? He did not understand how any feline could have entered. Again the sound! Some living thing was moving about, and, manifestly, it was heavier than any cat.

"Who's there?" Stumps called.

There was a quick spring, and a man stood by the bed. A strong hand grasped the questioner's throat.

"Be still, or you die!" hissed a voice.

Stumps's courage did not desert him.

"Mister, you've got the advantage o' me," he remarked, with surprising coolness.

"I mean ter keep it."

"Who be you?"

"None o' yer business!"

"What d'ye want?"

"I want you!"

"You seem ter hev got me."

"Mark what I say: Ef you utter a loud word, I'll drive this knife inter ye!"

"I hear ye. But, say, ef you're a robber, you'll not git any great haul here. I ain't got ten dollars ter my name."

"Ter blazes with yer money! That ain't wot I'm after. It's you!"

"Oh! is it? Wot d'ye want o' me?"

"You thought you did a smart thing when you fished a certain party out o' the waters o' the bay, didn't you? Wal, it's goin' ter cost you dear!"

"Why?" Stumps asked, quickly.

"Because you was too fresh. You thought you did a big act when you croaked about that ring, an' give the theory that the dead girl was Elnora Block's daughter, didn't you?"

"What o' it?"

"What business had you ter meddle, you stump-legged old idiot?"

"Ah! so I hit near the truth, did I?"

"Your hit will cost you dear. You interfered with men who won't stand no nonsense; you poked your nose into a dangerous secret."

"Why does it concern you?"

"Never mind! I'm talkin' about you! I tell you that you made the biggest bull of yer life. Do yer know what yer meddlin' will cost you?"

"What?"

"Yer life!"

"Sol! Do you mean—"

The grasp on Stumps's throat was tightened.

"I mean thet you've got ter die!" hissed the intruder.

CHAPTER IV.

HUNTED OR HAUNTED?

STUMPS realized his peril fully. A night intruder is always an object of dread, but the directness of this man's words, his demeanor, and his actions, left no doubt as to his intentions. He had tightened his hold until the crippled object of his revenge could not cry out, and all things seemed to be going his way.

"You'll squeal on us, an' git the perleece on our track, will you?" added the would-be assassin. "You'll identify the body an' the ring, will ye? Wal, you've done harm enough, already, but you'll never do any more. Say good-by to the world, an' go to join Elnora's daughter!"

Tighter gripped the cruel fingers, and Stumps knew he would die, unaided and alone, unless his individual efforts could save him.

He began to struggle desperately.

His crippled leg was very much against him, but he was young enough to retain his old strength, otherwise, and his enemy found this was no trifle. While the one was busy the other was, and Stumps dealt the unknown several blows in the face which must have done execution.

But Stumps could not guide all of his strokes, and the other held grimly to his throat.

It seemed an age to Stumps that they struggled there, and the bed creaked and groaned under their evolutions. He felt his senses going under the strangulation that was well under

way, and summoned all his strength for a last effort.

He gave a blow with such force and accuracy that his assailant staggered back and released his hold, and then Stumps sounded a long, loud cry for help.

"You will, will ye?" hissed the unknown. "Then we'll see, wot a knife kin do!"

He sprung to the attack, again; there was a heavy blow not made with his hand, alone, and Stumps felt a knife glide along his side, so close that its cold surface was apparent to his flesh, and the wielder's hand struck Stumps's body as the blade was buried in the bed.

Recollection of his crippled leg was vivid, then, and, realizing how helpless he would be in a chase around the room, he determined to try strategy. He groaned loudly and, though fearful as to the result, lay still.

The artifice would not have saved him had not the unknown been confused by the blows he had received, and by sounds in the next room which told that others in the house were astir, alarmed by the cry for help.

Twice more he struck, one blow, only, touching the mark, and then desire for his own safety overcome all other feelings.

Believing his work was done, he turned and fled.

A few moments later two men, lodgers in the house, hurriedly entered the room. They saw the crippled man lying motionless on the bed, the sheets of which were stained with blood, and they rushed to a conclusion.

"Dead, and murdered!" exclaimed one of the newcomers. "Quick, Dan!—run for a policeman! The assassin can't be far away, and he may be caught, yet. Poor Stumps!"

The following morning one of the daily papers had this article, prefaced by gory head-lines in big letters:

"A man whose real name is unknown, but was familiarly called 'Stumps,' was murdered last night at No. 17 — street. The perpetrator of the crime was a negro girl, who had become enraged by offensive remarks from Stumps, concerning her color. At the hour of going to press no arrests had been made. As is usual with this paper we had a reporter early on the scene. Where the reporters of our esteemed contemporaries were we know n't, unless they were in bed. Our readers know what paper to buy to get the correct and latest news."

This announcement sent Jim Royal in haste to Mr. Stumps's quarters, and he was there surprised to find that gentleman calmly disposing of his breakfast.

"What! aren't you dead?" he asked.

"No. Did ye see it in the paper Jeems?"

"Yes; that is what brought me here."

"That's the best evidence that it ain't so. I had some doubts on the subjick, myself, this mornin', fer I was a good 'eal broke up, but when I read in the paper that I was dead I felt relieved; it was sure proof that I was alive."

"But was there no ground for the report?"

"There was a heap of it, though imagination an' brag entered mostly inter the Daily Liar's note. I ain't dead, an' the colored girl is a myth. An ambitious reporter heard there was a murder, an' he give his fancy full play an' furnished a murderer off-hand. Very likely the colored girl will be arrested in the evenin' edition, but the police won't know of it. But, hear my story!"

He told of the assault, leaving out the conversation at the bedside, and explaining that his wound had been a mere scratch, so that when he recovered from his swoon he was all right, barring a nervous shock.

"But, Jeems, the attack was all fer the best. We are on the right track as ter the drowned girl. She was Elnora Block's daughter!"

"How do you know?"

"My assailant give it away."

Stumps then told what the would-be strangler had said at his bedside.

"Among them who viewed the girl's body after we brought it ter New York was some one who was concerned in making way with her. He heard me speak o' the ring, an' of Elnora Block, an' knew I had put the police on the right track. Ter prevent me doin' more ter direct suspicion ag'in' them, he, or a hired agent, come ter kill me last night, an' it wan't no fault o' his that he failed. Ain't my guess right?"

"I believe it is, Mr. Stumps."

"Then we're on the track, Spotter Jim."

"So are the enemy, it seems."

"We kin defy them."

"We can't defy attacks like this."

"We must either defy or avoid them, Jeems, fer they are likely ter keep up, or try to. As fer me, my obituary has been writ up, an' I'm dead. I'm goin' ter remain so, fer the present. A de-

tective was here this mornin', an' he agreed that the whole perleece department should retire inter secrecy, an' say no more about me. *I'm dead!* It's hard fer a one-legged man ter disguise himself, but these respectable clothes o' mine are ter be laid on the shelf ter-day, an' I blossom out in rags, ter masquerade ez an old beggar, but still one o' the Spotter Trio."

"I catch your idea."

"I wish, Jeems, you an' me an' Bobby could catch them diabolical rascals."

"We'll try."

"The first thing is ter find out who Elnora Block married, an' ter do that we must hunt up the owners of old Cap'n Block's vessel."

"Yes."

"I'm afeered they're out o' business."

"What about the Angel o' the Docks?"

"I can't grasp that myst'ry. The girl can't be alive and dead, both, at once. The Angel puzzles me, I allow. But ef she goes often ter the pier, we kin lay in wait fer her there, an' foler her home. There may, or may not, be hope from her."

"Bobby is sanguine, and I believe he is right."

"Well, we will sift all the evidence. Ef that poor girl was Miss Elnora's child, I'll avenge her death ef it takes ten years to do it."

The matter was discussed further, and then Jim went out and ordered a cab. In this Stumps was taken to another house, and in a few hours he had developed into a very ragged man who wore blue-glass goggles. As he said, it was not a very perfect disguise, but he did not believe any of the enemy had been able to fix his face in memory, and he might do some good work against them.

Jim had promised to take Bobby Blossom with him, and he was on his way to join his young ally when he chanced to observe a man who was standing in a doorway and peering out furtively.

The frightened expression on this man's face attracted Jim's notice still further, but he would have passed in silence had not the man run out and stopped him.

Seizing Jim's arm he eagerly asked:

"Did you see any one 'round the corner?"

"I saw a good many folks."

"But I mean a—girl!"

"I saw several girls."

"But this one was slight an' pale."

The stranger was pale, himself, though not slight, and his wild, frightened expression was like that of a hunted animal.

Jim Royal saw all this with vague curiosity.

"If I saw her, I did not notice her in particular."

"Mebbe she's gone."

"Is she after you?"

"I'm afraid so."

"What have you been doing to her?"

"Nothin', nothin'!" was the hasty reply.

"Then why are you afraid of her?"

"I ain't afraid of anybody," the man asserted, but his manner belied his words. "I ain't done anything out o' the way, but that don't mean but I'm persecuted. When a woman sets out ter sorry a man she does it in a little, low, mean way no man ever could imitate."

This explanation was made without any spirit, and the speaker looked steadfastly at the pavement. Not once was his gaze raised to meet Jim's. When he had made his so-called explanation he added an abrupt "Good-day!" and hastened off.

Jim went his way, too, but was soon accosted again, this time by an intelligent-looking mechanic.

"What's Ira Ricketts been giving you, sir?" he asked.

"Who is Ira Ricketts?"

"The man you were just talking with."

"Oh! Well, Ira said something about the weather, if I recollect aright. What's the matter with him?"

"I don't know; he's all broke up, the last few days, over something. Ira is a good fellow, and I hate to see him so off. I don't know whether an enemy is chasing him, or he has got a crazy fit coming on. Anyhow, he is haggard and wild-eyed, and goes skulking about the streets like a hunted man. If you are a personal friend of his, stranger, I wish you'd keep an eye on him, when near. I'm worried about him."

CHAPTER V.

SPOTTING A SPORT.

JIM did not see that Ira Ricketts's case need interest him to any great extent, and he made a suitable reply to the last speaker and then went on. Finding Bobby Blossom, he went with him to visit the police and learn if there were

any new developments in regard to the drowned girl.

The papers of the day had a full account of the finding of the body, together with Stumps's alleged identification of the ring, his reference to Elnora Block, and a call for information as to the present whereabouts of the sometime owners of the vessel of which Block had been captain.

On their arrival the amateur detectives were informed that there was nothing new.

While they were hesitating what to do next a young man made his appearance. He probably fancied that he was faultlessly attired, and money had certainly been put out generously on his outfit, but with such taste that his rank in life was to be determined by an expert at one glance.

"A sport," Jim thought. "Is he a gambler, a bunco-steerer, or does he keep within the pale of the law?"

After a careless glance around the room he nodded affably to the officer in charge, and then observed:

"My name is Delno Wainbridge."

"Have you business, sir?"

"Yes. I have read the account of the drowned girl, and have called in regard to the matter."

"Did you know her?"

"Oh, no! I am unable to give any light, but have dropped around to prevent the police from wasting any time on a false clew. If the one-legged man was sincere in his statements, he was on the wrong track."

"In what respect?"

"The drowned girl cannot have been Elnora Block's child, for Miss Block died unmarried."

"Are you sure?"

"Perfectly. Although only about eleven years old when she died, I remember her distinctly, as well as Captain Block, who died a few years after her. My father was half-owner in the vessel, and retired from business when their vessel became unseaworthy. He and his partner are both dead. Elnora was lost at sea."

"How, then, do you account for the ring being found?"

"I have not gone so far as to speculate on that point. I am too busy a man to delve in outside problems, and only called here, now, to set you right. As to the ring, peculiar as it is said to be, there may have been others like it, or it may not have been on Miss Block's hand when she was washed overboard."

"Do you remember the ring she had?"

"No, sir."

"Yet, it is said she always wore it."

"I was a boy, and not interested in women's jewelry. As well as I knew old Captain Block's daughter, I could not now describe a thing she wore."

"You say she died—when?"

"About twenty years ago."

"Lost at sea?"

"Yes, sir. She was as bold as she was amiable, and insisted upon standing on deck during a storm. A great wave broke over the deck, and she was carried away. I know she was not married. What became of the ring I can't say, for, as before stated, I remember nothing about it."

"Did Captain Block have other children?"

"No, sir."

"What relatives?"

"I don't know. I never knew of any."

"These questions are only formal, for, if Miss Block died single, that settles the question of marriage. Where did the captain die?"

"Possibly in New York; more likely, in Cuba, where he had some land, or mercantile interests. I was at school at Albany, at the time."

"That is all, Mr. Wainbridge."

The son of the sometime ship-owner took his departure.

Now, not being a mind-reader, Jim was not able to say whether the police sergeant took all this statement to be a fact open to no doubt, but, for himself, Jim was not inclined to swallow it all, readily. He did not like Delno Wainbridge. The latter's manner was plausible enough, but, in the amateur detective's estimation, the fact that he was a sport was not in his favor.

Jim was impressed with the belief that it would do no harm to know more about a man who knew so much.

Making a secret motion to Bobby Blossom, while Wainbridge talked, he caused his ally to leave, and be ready for action outside, but it was Spotter Jim's wish to do the work himself, unless he was prevented by accident.

This did not occur, and when Delno left the office, without another glance at the smooth-

faced youth whom he had not recognized as Stumps's fellow-sailor, and had deemed unworthy of attention, Jim quietly slipped out after him.

Bobby's face lengthened when he saw that the work of following Wainbridge was to be taken from him, but he acquiesced cheerfully in the plan, and Jim went on alone.

Mr. Wainbridge's manner had been mild and modest in the office, and it continued so for some time, but when fairly beyond sight of that place, it changed. He began to swing his cane jauntily, and look at passing girls more attentively than seemed necessary.

"Regular man-about-town," the pursuer thought. "Maybe I am foolish to take all this trouble, but such an airy butterfly as Mr. Wainbridge is not always easily located when wanted. Nothing like placing him now."

This was done, but not without difficulty. By accident or design Delno took many a crook and turn, and entered large buildings by one door and left through another.

All this may have been accident, but no power could have made James believe it then.

"He's bound to throw possible followers off the scent, but he's got to hustle to leave me. I don't think he has seen or suspected me yet, and he must not."

Skillful work on the pursuer's part enabled him to accomplish his ends, and he finally saw Wainbridge enter a building on one of the streets contiguous to Wall street.

For a moment Jim hesitated at the door, but he was determined to make a bold push. Entering promptly, he followed until Wainbridge entered an office. When the door closed Jim read the lettering thereon. It was as follows:

"OKLAHOMA IRON-CLAD LAND CO.,

Of Weewabagos, Ok., and New York.

LLEWELLYN R. BENTON. JOHN C. PUGH.

Reliable Investments."

The investigator turned slowly away. Wainbridge had entered with the air of one perfectly at home. Was he in a land investment company?

Jim was anxious to see some one and learn more about the matter, if he could, but, while he was considering whether it would be safe, he had a better idea.

He knew a very honorable Wall street man, whose experience and depth of information held second place to no man's, and as the banker was under obligations to Jim, the latter felt that he might apply safely.

He went, and, after a little preliminary talk, came to the point bluntly:

"Do you know anything about the Oklahoma Iron-Clad Land Company?"

"What! has old Bellaire roped you into his snap?"

"Who, sir?"

"Cheney Bellaire."

"I never heard of him."

"Ever hear of Llewellyn R. Benton and John C. Pugh?"

"Their names are on the door of the land company's office."

"They are myths."

"And this Bellaire runs the thing?"

"He is one of the conspirators; a certain Delno Wainbridge is the other. But the visible persons are clerks. Benton and Pugh are always 'out,' or in Oklahoma. See?"

"The thing is a swindle, then?"

"I think it is."

"Who, and what, is Wainbridge?"

"He is the brains of the concern. Bellaire is old and slow, but quick enough to turn a dollar, honestly or dishonestly. Wainbridge has had a varied and erratic career, with bucket-shop keeping as a specialty. As a figure in wildcat securities he stands with the leaders, yet he never has had much to work with. Bunco and blackmail would not shock Delno. He ought to be in State Prison, but is one of those infernally slippery fellows who always keep out of trouble. But when you put tags on the sharks of New York, don't neglect to label Wainbridge, 'The Man with the Peerless Sharp Tooth!' He would be hard to eclipse."

"Bellaire is just as bad?"

"He is in with Delno, now, and from the way he dodges those who have invested with them, it is clear he is not a Jonah but a shark."

"You don't like them, I see."

"Bellaire I never knew to be a rascal until he went into the land company. He was an old sea-captain—retired only a few years ago."

Jim grew freshly interested.

"Is he married?"

"No; and never was. He had a brother, Harper Bellaire, who married. He was a clerk at some foreign port. People used to say Harper had all the brains of the family, but Captain Cheney Bellaire got there with both feet, generally, if his wits did seem to work slowly."

"What has become of the brother?"

"Dead!"

"And his family?"

"I don't know anything of them."

"Whom did Harper marry?"

"That I don't know. I never saw him after he was twenty-five, or such a matter. He went away in Captain Bellaire's vessel, but stopped off at some foreign port, settled and married there. That was my last look at him. I have a vague impression, however, that he married the daughter of some seafaring man. I think I heard so."

CHAPTER VI.

A HIGHLY IMPORTANT PAPER.

JUST as Jim was about to abandon the interview, his interest was freshly aroused by the last statement.

"Would you know the name of his wife if you heard it?" he asked, quickly.

"No. I think not."

"It wasn't Elnora Block?"

Evidently the banker had not read the account of the drowned girl, for he shook his head.

"I don't know. I didn't lay it up, if I ever heard it, and it's twenty-five years since I saw Harper Bellaire. Memories of passing associates die out in that time, you know."

The banker had told all he could, and Spotter Jim left the office. As he walked away he struggled with the question: Had he wasted all his time in making these inquiries? He could not see much light in it all, but was not sorry that he had learned so much about Wainbridge and Bellaire. If it did no good, it could do no harm.

He was pursuing his way when a very ragged man appeared in his path.

"Hello, Stumps!" he exclaimed. "You here?"

"You bet! I've been working on an idea," replied the wooden-legged man.

"On our case?"

"Yes, an' I've got news, Jeems. Do you know, after I see you last I thought of a man who ought ter know more about Elnora Block. I went ter see him, an' I've got a p'inter, though w'ot it will amount ter, I don't know. I've found out that Elnora married."

"Did she really marry?"

"Sure! His name I didn't learn, though. He never was known ter the man who told me. One thing more: Old Cap'n Block died in New York. Now, what is the next step we're ter take?"

"I've been thinking. Did Captain Block leave any money, or real estate?"

"I hev a notion he left both. He once had a house, an' his total ought ter hev riz up in the small thousands."

"Then, my friend, there is still hope for us. Unless he sold his property before he died, and presented the cash to his daughter, or some one else, there should be a record of his will, or the settlement of his estate."

"Right, right!" Stumps cried, quickly. "I'm in rags, but you ain't. Go you an' look. The old cap'n was very systematic, an' it would be jest like him ter make a will, even ef he give all ter his daughter; an' ef he did make one, her name is sure ter appear in it. Go an' see ef sech a will was probated."

It was new work for Jim, but he bearded the guardians of the department in their den, and, after a little delay, learned two things. First, there was a will of Jonathan Block, mariner; secondly, he could see it.

With growing eagerness he unfolded the paper and was soon perusing it.

The will began with an expression of the testator's belief in a Divine Father and His mercies; then directed that all the testator's "just debts" be paid; then proceeded to business in these words:

"*Imprints:* I give and bequeath to my beloved and dutiful daughter, Elnora, wife of Harper Bellaire, now residing at Calcutta, India, as a token of my love to her, my only direct heir, all and sundry the moneys, bonds, notes, deeds real estate, or whatsoever other article, or articles, I may die seized of, after the payment, or bestowal, of the sums, or articles, mentioned in the Items hereafter named."

Then followed several "Items," in which two hundred dollars in small legacies, and several articles of nominal value, were disposed of. Only one bequest proved of value to the investigator.

It was as follows:

"*Item:* I give and bequeath to Capt. Cheney Bellaire, brother of Harper Bellaire, my gold-mounted walking-stick; the same he once presented to me, as I wish it to return to its proper owner, as a memento of a fellow-sailor."

Only one thing more held Jim's attention; the name of the executor was there, and he copied it carefully.

He left the office in a very different frame of mind than when he entered. The case was moving on.

Elnora Block had married Harper Bellaire, and Cheney Bellaire's partner, Wainbridge, had gone to the police with a story which, beyond doubt, he knew to be false. Why did he want it believed? Was it he who wished it believed, or—did the hand of another man show through the gauze?

Did Cheney Bellaire wish to stifle investigation as to the end of the drowned girl?

"If so, why?"

Returning to Stumps he made a full report, to which that person listened with close attention. At the conclusion he shook hands gravely with his ally.

"Perhaps ef the police knew all this they would want ter know ef I was sure that was Elnora's ring," he observed, "an' then, ag'in, perhaps they wouldn't. Elnora married Harper Bellaire. Very likely they had a daughter. Now, after eighteen or twenty years a girl is found in the waters o' the bay, wearing that ring. Found drowned? Who knows? The marks o' human fingers are on her neck, but the coroner ain't said, yet, whether she was alive when she went into the water or not."

"Anyhow, I don't believe she went in willingly."

"Nor me. Wal, that girl was Elnora's child; I'm just sure of it. What's ter be done? Naturally, we should rush ter Captain Bellaire, ter ask fer information an' ter give it, but he has put a block in the way, happily fer us. With investigation started in the right channel, Bellaire's partner appears ter stop it. Why was his lie told?"

"For Bellaire's sake."

"Why?"

"Why," Jim repeated, "if he is not afraid to have the truth known?"

"Ay; but why should the man want ter shut off investigation when his niece has met with a tragic end? There are times, Jeems, when the wicked over-reach themselves, an' this is a sample. When Bellaire sent his partner ter tell that lie, he furnished the first item o' proof against himself. But fer that he might never have been suspected. Now, we are on the track."

"Shall we go to the police?"

"Jeems, you hev done some detective work in a quiet way, before this, when the Three Spotters gathered in the rogues who kidnapped the actress. Why not keep it up? Why not look around a bit, yourself, before goin' ter others with a story they may not believe?"

"You put my own thoughts in words."

"Do you see your way clear?"

"Bellaire must be shadowed, fer one thing."

"What else?"

"We cannot ignore the Angel of the Docks. Her talk about the face in the water, and her claim that she was drowned, herself, would not be worthy of notice, but she described the ring to the letter. Recollect that the newspapers had not told the story, and Bobby had not heard it from us, when she talked on the pier and he brought the news to us. The Angel of the Docks knows something about it."

"But I can't see where she comes in."

"Nor I."

"Anyhow, she must be watched for, an' folloed home. You or Bobby must do this tonight."

"Right! My first move will be to see the executor of Captain Block's will, and I will go there at once. You had better go back to Bobby."

"I will."

Stumps went to find young Mr. Blossom, but did not succeed. There was good reason for this; Bobby had secured a job.

After Jim left him he loitered on Broadway, waiting for his friend to return, and indulging in a few games with a newsboy to pass the time, but Time beat him out. Jim did not return, and Bobby grew impatient. He was in this mood when he saw a man approaching whom he quickly recognized as Delno Wainbridge.

Bobby thrust his hands into his pockets, assumed a "tough" look, and gazed hard at vacancy. He indulged the fond belief that, being small and young, he would escape all notice, but it was not to be.

Delno moderated his pace and looked steadily at the boy.

Bobby did not take his own gaze away from vacancy, but was fully conscious of the regard.

"His Nibs knows me!" was his reluctant conclusion.

Then the sport came up quickly.

"Hallo, young fellow!" he exclaimed.

"Hullo!" Bobby returned, but in a surly manner that went well with his "tough" expression.

"How is business with you?"

"Rushin'—by the door!"

"Do you want a job?"

"Does a boss want grass?"

"I see," Delno laughed. "You are out of cash, and out of love with the world, and inclined to be an Anarchist. Well, other men feel as you when hard pressed. What's your name?"

"Blos Roberts," Bobby replied, promptly.

"Just as good a handle as George Washington Rothschild. Boy, are you built right so that good pay would make you know just as much as your employer wishes, and no more!"

"That's about my caliber, boss."

"Did you ever figure as a messenger boy?"

"Naw."

"Suppose I fitted you out in a messenger's uniform, and sent you on an errand, could you, and would you, do it well?"

Bobby's wits were working.

"Et would all depend on how de 'stuff' was put up, boss. See?"

Wainbridge laughed.

"You are all right; just the kind of Young America that is bound to succeed in the world. Come with me to yonder cab, which I will engage; and we will go where the uniform is."

The junior member of the Spotter Trio obeyed, and they were soon bounding up Broadway in the vehicle.

What was before him young Mr. Blossom knew not, but his was an adventuresome nature, and he was bold enough to test the matter. He hung grimly to his assumption of "toughness," and took care to deepen the impression on the sport, without showing undue eagerness. Instead, he held to his surly manner, but injected a dry joke now and then, as if by accident, with good effect.

Meanwhile, he was thinking!

"Great guns! but wouldn't I ketch it from R. Blossom's partners and relatives, ef this venture was known? Jim suspects the sport, an' here I've gone an' put my prize-package anatomy right in his grip. Wonder what will come of it?"

Northward rolled the cab until Clinton place was reached. There, at the corner of Broadway, the vehicle was dismissed, and the late passengers went on afoot. Their journey was almost ended, however, and Delno used a latch-key and entered one of the houses.

Clinton place does not abound in fine-looking residences, and this house was no exception, externally, but when the sport's room was reached, it proved to be so luxuriously furnished that Bobby looked around in astonishment.

"Jeho-hoss-fly!" he ejaculated.

"What is it?"

"Say, be you the Prince o' Turkey?"

"No. Why?"

"Cause this room is a perfect gem. Bet the Czar of England ain't got nothin' like it. Why, it's jest like a dream, b'jinks!"

"Glad you like it. Suits my taste, too. Sit down, Blos!"

"What! in them chairs?"

"Of course. Why not?"

"Yowlin' cats! I'll mash the red fuz all off 'um!"

Despite this prediction Bobby settled down in one of the chairs, but did it very gingerly. There had been no exaggeration in his comments. The room would have aroused admiration in one even older and more experienced.

But the young corner of the Spotted Trio soon turned his mind to more serious subjects.

CHAPTER VII.

A YOUNG WOMAN CAUSES PERPLEXITY.

WAINBRIDGE brought out a suit of clothes from a closet.

"This," he explained, "is a genuine messenger's outfit. It belonged to an ex-member of the messenger corps, and when he got through with it, I fell heir to it."

"Where's he now?" Bobby Blossom asked.

"In Sing Sing."

"Got another sort o' uniform, eh?"

"It was all his own fault," Delno explained, hastily. "If he had obeyed me, he would have been all right. When I take up with a boy I

advise him for his good, and if he obeys me, and serves me well, I make a man of him."

"I see."

Bobby believed he did see, but his belief and Mr. Wainbridge's intimation did not run in the same channel.

The sport brushed the suit very carefully, and then told Bobby to put it on. This was done, and it proved to be an excellent fit. Then he was brushed some more, and gazed at critically.

"It's a great go," commented the sport, "but I wish you would abandon that sullen expression that rests on your face, now and then. You look like a genuine Bowery tough, and would scare a Fifth Avenue dame into eleven different kinds of fits—bless her blue blood and heart of ice!"

"I'll try ter look meek," Bobby promised, dutifully.

"Well, you are to deliver a note at a certain house on Delancey street, and I want it done in a skillful and scientific way. Do you think you are equal to the demands of the occasion?"

"What salary do I git?"

"Five dollars for the job."

"Fer that royal sum I kin be skillful, discreet, deep, cunning, an' as perlite an' enticin' as the man who holds a straight flush in a game o' poker."

"Good! The note is to a young woman named Hilga Ermostroff. The name sounds very Norwegian, but the old blood has petered out in her; you'll find her English enough. You are not to know much when you get there, but what you do know you'll be sure of, and what you don't know you won't even guess at. See?"

"Yes."

"You will know this, and no more: If questioned, say that a young lady called at the telegraph office where you are employed and asked for a messenger to carry a letter. As you were first on the list, you got the job. That's all you know, except that, if requested, you can describe the lady who sent the note."

"Wot's her inventory?"

"About twenty years old, well dressed, pleasant looking; with brown hair and an aristocratic manner. Know this; know nothing more."

"I'm on."

"Are you ready to go?"

"Ready an' waitin'."

"Off you go, then."

The sport handed over the letter, and called Bobby's attention to the street and number on the envelope, so there need be no mistake; and then he was started off on his errand.

He went in a state of uncertainty. Was he on the trail of something important, or not? If he had known of Jim's discoveries since their first view of Delno Wainbridge, the question would not have been so much of a puzzle. As it was, Bobby was proceeding wholly in the dark, feeling that he might be engaged in some non-important service, but too careful to let any chance slip to learn more about the sport.

He read the name on the envelope.

"Hilga Ermostroff! Don't know her. Some Swedish nightingale—or did Delno say she was a Norwegian? I don't matter; the point is, be I interested in the case? There is mischief afoot, fer the sport has ordered me ter tell lies. R. Blossom, E-quire, them lies ain't told yet, an' whether they ever be, or not, depends on wot you find on Delancey street."

The latter place was reached in due time, and the specified house proved to be one of fair outward appearance. He rung the bell and briskly addressed the lady who appeared—a thin, angular person of middle age.

"Miss Hilga Ermostroff in?"

"Yes."

"Got a dockymment fer her."

"I'll take it in."

"I's ter d'liver it in person."

"Very well; Ill see her about it."

The speaker's manner was hesitating, and she looked at the envelope in such a curious, uncertain way that Bobby was puzzled to know what complication he had struck at this end of the line.

"You can wait here while I go up," she added.

"Wot's the matter with me goin' up, too?"

"I'm not sure she will see you."

"But I's ter d'liver this letter inter her own hands."

"I am perfectly willing. All will depend upon her. Let me go and tell her, and we will be governed by her decision."

The woman was as honest-looking and straightforward as she was homely, and Bobby decided that she was not trying to play any game on him. He yielded to her wishes, and waited while she went up-stairs. She was gone a long

time, and returned, finally, with a serious expression.

"Hilda declines to see you!"

"Why?"

"She says she don't want to."

"Did ye tell her my orders about handin' the letter to her personally?"

"Yes."

"An' she won't see me?"

"No."

"Then I'll hang on ter the letter."

"Wait a little. She was very firm, but I thought you would want to talk with her in person, so she has agreed to converse through the speaking-tube. One end is on the upper floor; the other, in this hall, yonder."

She indicated the place.

"Great yowlin' cats! be I ter talk through that tthingumjig?" Bobby demanded, aghast. "I ain't never had no experience, an' don't b'lieve I shall cover myself with glory. How d'ye make the critter work, anyhow?"

Due directions were given to him, and then he tried his hand, or, rather his lungs, for, with his mouth close to the orifice, he loudly shouted:

"Hello, Central!"

"Who is there?" came a faint reply, down the tube.

"Hello! hello! Gimme Hilga Ermostroff, an' don't be all day about it, Central! Hello, hello!"

"Don't be absurd," the woman directed. "This is not a telephone. Talk in a natural way."

But Bobby could hear nothing from above, and he repeated:

"Hello! hello!"

"Are you the boy?" came the faint reply!

"I'm him."

"Go away!"

"Eh? Hello! hello! I mean, wot's that? I go away? Hello! hello! But I've got a letter fer you. Leave it here? Can't do it; orders ter give it ter you in person. What's that? You won't see me? But, say—hello! hello!—wot be I goin' ter do with the letter? You don't care fer it? But it's important. Me go off, or you'll call the perleece! Say, don't be tough on a feller. Why not see me? I'm only a boy. Why don't you answer? Hello! hello!"

These comments and calls were broken by waits of long or short periods, according as the other party to the conversation answered, or would not answer. Much of the time she would say nothing, and Bobby saw that his mission was threatened with complete failure. Now, all was perfectly still above.

"Hello! hello!" he called again.

There was no answer.

"Hello! hello!"

"I think she has gone away," remarked the woman.

"Guess the circuit is shut off. Can't we ring up Central again?"

"If you want to act the clown, go elsewhere to do it; this is not a telephone, I tell you. It is a speaking-tube with no branches, and no 'Central.' I am not surprised that Hilga won't see you—"

"Why won't she?"

"I don't know."

"Who is she?"

"A new lodger of ours. For further particulars I must refer you to the lady, herself—when you see her. As for the letter, she undoubtedly will consent to receive it if you wish to send it up. Further than that I have nothing to say. This is your business, and, having see that you can't manage it in the way you selected, you must decide what you will do now."

Bobby meditated. Clearly, he could not finish the undertaking as directed. This would be no greater disappointment to Delno Wainbridge than it was to Delno's messenger. The latter had been very eager to see Hilga Ermostroff, and was signally baffled.

"Wal," he remarked, with a sigh, "you kin take the letter up, I s'pose, but afore you do it, I'd like ter inquire why Miss Hilga is so obstinate. Why won't she see me?"

"I don't know."

"But can't you guess?"

"Knowing her but little, I cannot."

Bobby felt sure this answer meant, "I will not," in plain English, but he accepted the situation as philosophically as possible. The woman took the letter up, was gone ten minutes, and then returned with the report:

"No answer!"

The messenger stood in silence for several minutes, and then turned and went out slowly without another word. Back to Delno Wainbridge he went and poured out his story, and his disappointment was so keen that it entered into his voice and manner, and the sport knew

his work had been done as faithfully as any one could desire. Evidently, the result troubled the employer, for after asking many questions, he paced the room in silence for several minutes.

Once, he muttered a comment on the luck which was far from amiable, but that was all. Finally he turned toward Bobby.

"You have done very well in this matter, and though, owing to causes beyond your control, it has been a signal failure, you have well earned your money. Now, you can resume your own clothes, but leave your address here. I may have other work for you to do; I often have jobs for a sharp, faithful boy."

CHAPTER VIII.

MYSTERIOUS EVENTS ON THE PIER.

BOBBY left Mr. Wainbridge and went in search of his own allies. He found Jim and Stumps at the former's room, and a general comparison of notes followed.

In the light of what Jim knew, and suspected, in regard to the sport, the latter's latest movements became interesting. There was nothing to show that he was pursuing the same scheme developed by his visit to the police and accompanying lies in regard to Elnora Black, and the Three Spotters did not know who Hilga Ermostroff was but their curiosity was aroused, and they pondered over the matter some time.

Matters that seemed more important demanded their attention, however.

Jim had called at the house where lived the administrator of old Captain Block's will, but that gentleman was out.

He had been told to return at eight o'clock, that night.

"This I shall do, of course," he explained, "but there is other work to be done. Of all our mysteries none is more interesting, or intricate, than that which surrounds the Angel of the Docks. You, Bobby, will be just the person for this work, I think."

"Me, too!" Bobby agreed.

"But don't let her see you. My idea is that you had better hide on the pier, watch for her coming, and, if she does come, let her move about unspoken to, and without gaining view of you. Then, when she leaves, you must follow her home silently, carefully and surely."

"Right you be, James the Ten-times!" Bobby agreed.

"This woman who goes to the docks and peers down for a drowned girl who wore such a famous ring must be investigated."

"I'm the huckleberry fer the job!"

Night was at hand, and, after a thorough discussion of the subject, the Spotter Trio had supper and prepared for the work. Stumps was not to go out, but he agreed to smoke and wish them well, and started his pipe early.

Bobby Blossom went off in his usual sanguine mood. He felt that he was destined for a great detective, and hoped to prove the fact in a hurry. He made his way to the pier at once. He hesitated in regard to calling on his friends, the Tiernans, and ended by keeping away.

He was afraid Tiernan would insist upon helping him, which would detract from his own laurels.

After looking the deserted pier over he selected his hiding-place. This was a battered old box which lay on its side, and he crawled inside like a dog to its kennel, and waited.

He could see clear to the street. No one was in sight.

Ten minutes passed, and then dark shapes appeared at the street-end of the pier. They drew nearer, and resolved themselves into the form of two men. One began to hesitate, but his fellow seized his arm and roughly dragged him forward.

"Drunks!" muttered Bobby, in disgust. "Ef they knock my scheme out I'll hev them arrested fer hevin' a jag on."

But the men were not intoxicated, as he soon perceived. He who hesitated was actuated by some other motive, but it was not considered by his companion. He dragged his fellow forward to the edge of the pier.

"There, you fool!" he exclaimed, "do you see anything that is goin' ter bite you?"

"No," was the low reply.

"Wal, ye won't, an' I wish you'd git over yer childish fears. Why, you're tremblin', now!"

"I'm frightened, Barney."

"What at? Ghosts?"

"I don't believe in sech things—at least, I never used to. But, surely, ef there be ghosts, we shall see them!"

"Stuff! Rubbish!"

"What ef one should rise out o' that black expanse o' water?"

"Oh! you make me tired, Ira Ricketts!"

Bobby was listening with interest, but mention of the last name made him all the more so. Jim Royal had told of the man thus named whom he had seen on the street corner, and it was plain that the same person now stood on the pier.

"Your conscience may be seared, but mine ain't," replied Ira, with more spirit. "We were strong men who ought ter been in better business, lettin' alone the wickedness of it; but we went right on. I never would 'a' been in it, though, ef I'd known what was ter be done."

"Did we do it on purpose?"

"No."

"Then w'ot be you howlin' erbout?"

"It's w'ot we did, not w'ot we meant ter."

"Mebbe you want ter turn informer? Mebbe—"

Barney bent until his mouth was near Ira's ear and added several words in a lower tone which the eager listener did not hear. Ira started.

"No, no!" he cried; "I never shall tell. Tell! Me ciful Providence! my great concern is that it will leak out, without anybody tellin'. I am all unnerved, an' fancy danger in the most triflin' sound. Why, only ter-day I see a girl on the street so much like her that I thought she had come back ter life, an' I hid in a doorway an' was scared out o' my wits."

"You never had any wits ter be scared out o' you."

"That's all right, McCurdy, but I'd never joined you ef I'd known as much o' your purpose ez I do now."

"You knew it then; you don't, now. I tell you we meant no harm. That's straight. But we wander from the subjick. Here we be, an' I want you ter see that there's nothin' here ter harm you."

"I ain't so sure o' that."

"Expect a ghost ter rise up, do ye?"

"I think that girl must haunt the place, even ef she ain't visible to us."

"Rubbish! The dead don't come back."

"Some claim they do, an' the girl may be lookin' at us, even now. She may be watchin' in spirit from over her poor body. She may hear every word we say. She may be near enough, in spirit form, ter touch us—"

"Are you looking for my body?"

In a low, plaintive voice came the question just behind the men. Both turned suddenly, startled to an extreme. Before them stood a female form, and the night was not so dark but that they could see by its slight, graceful formation that she was young.

"Do you see my face floating in the water?" she added, in the same, plaintive, far-away voice.

Barney McCurdy uttered a yell of terror, and throwing all restraint to the winds, ran madly down the pier. His companion was dazed, but as the new-comer lifted her hand the spell broke, and with a gasp of terror, he sprang away in Barney's wake.

Their feet pounded on the pier for a few seconds, but terror gave unusual speed to their headlong flight, and they were soon gone from sight and hearing.

Then the object of their fright turned and put her hand to her head in a puzzled way.

"I don't understand it," she murmured.

Bobby Blossom was still in the box, but he did not fully share the alarm of the men. The new-comer was no stranger to him; it was the Angel of the Docks. She appeared precisely as she had before, and was, no doubt, of the same substance, human or spirit, as it might be.

But at that moment Spotter Robert's faith was shaken. Example is contagious, and he was led to ask himself: Was the Angel really human?

There was a rapid throbbing under his jacket on the left side, and he would not have quarreled with any one who accused him of being afraid. He gazed with rapt attention at the girl wanderer of the night.

Human, or spirit?

He could not tell, and all his natural common sense failed to calm him at once. He felt more like keeping quiet than acting the bold detective.

The Angel of the Docks advanced to where the men had been standing, and, as on the previous night, stood gazing down at the water. She moved from point to point, presently, and kept up the scrutiny—a work which seemed very weird and unwholesome to Bobby, though he began to recover his courage.

Moreover, he began to fear that McCurdy and Ricketts would come back, but she had the scene to herself.

Nearly half an hour passed before she showed any signs of leaving. Then, with a sigh, she

abandoned her vain search and began to walk away.

Bobby quietly crawled out of the box.

"Ghost, goblin or woman, I'm bound ter foller her," he decided. "I guess I'm as safe from her as she is from Barney an' Ira."

It was a natural supposition. The boundless terror the Angel of the Docks had inspired in the men's minds was proof enough that she had recalled thoughts of some crime, and it seemed natural that they should seek to solve the question—human, or spirit?

Bobby thought she would be lucky to get away safely.

She left the pier with the singular simple confidence which marked all her movements, and was not boldness; no one would be attracted by her coming and going unless previously interested.

Bobby looked to the right and left. Were the men hiding by Tiernan's house, or elsewhere, to intercept her?

She passed the most critical point, and reached the street. Without the least hesitation she went on her way, and as one corner after another was passed, the pursuer was forced to the belief that McCurdy and Ricketts had been so thoroughly frightened that they had no desire to return, or to see her again.

Bobby's feelings toward them were not of this nature. They had suddenly assumed importance in his estimation. The chief points of their conversation on the pier remained vivid in his mind, and their own words, together with their fears, later, led him to a conclusion.

Ricketts was dismayed because of some crime they had committed, and if it was not the slaying of a girl on the pier, their speech had been very deceptive. Moreover, they had thought the Angel of the Docks to be the ghost of the slain girl.

What was all this mystery?

Certain theories were in Bobby's mind, but he was still at a loss for the main thread; suspicions were common, but proof was lacking.

On went the Angel in her quiet way, and her lightness of foot amazed the pursuer. At times what was practical in his mind wavered. Was she really a spirit?

At last she reached a vicinity he had seen before that day, and, turning, she paused at the door of a certain house, fitted a key to the lock, opened the door, entered and disappeared from view.

Bobby Blossom stopped short and stood looking blankly at the house.

It was the same Delancey street residence to which he had been sent by Delno Wainbridge; the place where he had tried in vain to deliver a letter to Hilga Ermstroff!

"Great yowlin' cats!" he ejaculated, "w'ot does this mean? Is that house an orfin asylum fer young women? Is it full o' ghosts an' queer live-gals? Ef not, w'ot is it? Here is the Angel hived, an' here lives Hilga. Sport Wainbridge is interested in Hilga; the pier toughs think the Angel is the ghost of a gal they made way with; a drowned gal was found in the bay. What does it mean? R. Blossom, you are on the track o' the biggest myst'ry you ever heerd tell of. You be, b' mighty!"

He lingered, watching the house.

Would the Angel remain there?

Was it possible that Hilga might appear?

Would it be prudent to ring the bell and ask for particulars?

He considered this point for some time, but, in the end, decided negatively.

"Not fer Ephraim!" he declared. "I'd be liable ter put my foot inter it, an' I'll jest sail back ter port an' let Cap'n Jim grapple with the case. That's my best holt."

And he hastened away.

CHAPTER IX.

THE HERMIT OF DELANCEY STREET.

IN the mean while Jim was attending to his part of the work. Anxious to question the executor of Captain Block's will he presented himself at that gentleman's house at the hour it was said he would be in.

There was no trouble in getting audience with him, and one look at his patriarchal, honest face was enough to show that he was not one to be concerned in lawless plots and crimes.

Jim explained that he was seeking for information in regard to Captain Block's family, and was not bothered with any cross-questioning.

"All gone now!" sighed the executor. "The captain left but one child, and she is dead."

"Her name was—"

"Elnora."

"Did she ever marry?"

"Oh! yes; married Harper Bellaire, brother of Captain Cheney Bellaire who, as far as I know, is still a resident of New York."

"Did you know the two families well, Mr. Aymer?"

"I knew the Blocks intimately; the Bellaires, slightly. Cheney Bellaire was a sea-captain; Harper, a clerk in Calcutta, India. Harper was a good fellow. I can't say as much for Cheney; I never liked him. I have an idea that the captain swindled his brother, or the latter's heirs, whoever they were. While Harper was still in New York the brothers purchased a tract of Western land together, for almost nothing. A town finally sprung up there, grew to be a city, and has made Cheney rich. It must have been very valuable in the last part of Harper's life, but I don't think he ever knew of it. Remote from the United States he left Cheney to care for their interests. Letters I then received from Harper speak of his poverty. Then, I did not know of the land's rise in value; now, reading them, I believe Harper was wronged."

"You speak of Harper Bellaire's heirs. Who were they?"

"I don't know. Perhaps Captain Cheney was sole heir; anyhow, I believe he scooped in everything."

"Did Harper leave no children?"

"No."

"Didn't he ever have any?"

"Yes; a daughter, Lenore."

"What became of her?"

"I supposed you knew. Harper Bellaire, his wife and child were lost at sea."

Jim's expression became grave.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. The family made a voyage in Captain Bellaire's vessel, the 'Glideaway,' I believe; and all were lost in a storm."

"Do you know this to be true?"

"Well, I can hardly say I know it. No; I don't know it. I was not there, and never have seen any one who was, but the report came to New York and was circulated among those who once knew Harper Bellaire. It was never questioned to my knowledge. But why do you ask? Do you doubt it?"

This was a question which Jim did not care to answer in full. While his companion seemed to be a man of perfect honor it would do no good to pour out all the secrets of the Spotter Trio in such a happy-go-lucky style. He answered Mr. Aymer in a diplomatic way, and, when satisfied that he had learned all that was to be told, left the house and returned to Stumps.

While no great discovery had been made, one important point had been arrived at: Elnora Block had not only married, but been the mother of a daughter.

"It is curious," Jim remarked, to Stumps, "how this statement agrees and disagrees with that made by Delno Wainbridge when he visited the police and told his story—a story which we believe was inspired by Captain Bellaire."

"Sure!"

"Both accounts affirm that Elnora Block was lost at sea, but while her old friend, Mr. Aymer, avows that she was a wife and a mother, Wainbridge positively declared she never was married."

"An' that's jest where the cloven hoof shows," declared Stumps. "Cheney Bellaire sent him there with a lie. If caught in it, Wainbridge, who seems ter have no interest, has only ter say he was mistaken—so they think. But why need the lie be told?"

"Because there is a guilty secret to hide."

"An' they don't want the drowned girl identified."

"Why not, if Elnora's child was lost at sea?"

"That's it; why not? My friend, there's an awful black 'nigger in the wood-pile,' an' it's fer us ter find out the shape o' the African gentleman."

"I am eager to hear Bobby's report."

And Bobby was eager to make it, as was shown when he arrived. He entered with his eyes looking preternaturally large, and, as was his custom when excited, dashed his cap down on the floor.

"Great yowlin' cats!" he ejaculated.

"What now?"

"Beloved feller-citizens, you've missed more fun ter-night than the boy who went ter the circus instead o' tyin' a tin-can onto the dog's tail. Takes me ter git at things. I've seen ghosts, goblins, spooks, assassins, robbers, outlaws and pirates!"

Robert kicked his inoffensive cap with such vigor that it flew across the room, almost hitting Mr. Stumps's nose in the passage.

"Yes; an' I've hived the Angel o' the Docks with Hilga Ermstroff, Esquire!" he added, as he

flung one of his shoes at a lone cat which had tried to enter the room.

Young Mr. Blossom was excited, and it took his companions several moments to get him down to facts, but the story of his adventures finally was told.

Fresh surprise, perplexity, doubts and questions followed, but out of the muddle one fact presented itself vividly:

The Angel of the Docks ought to be seen personally.

"I'll go early in the morning," Jim declared.

The three detectives discussed the matter in all its bearings before retiring, and that meant that they were not early in bed. When they retired it was not easy to go to sleep. The solution of the mystery seemed almost in their grasp, yet it eluded them most vexatiously.

Jim rung the bell of No. — Delancey street. The forenoon sun was shining on the house-tops of Gotham, but the detective had called as early as he thought prudent. Gothamites are not early risers, and these particular members of the great city's family would not like to be called up out of bed.

The door was opened by a lady whom the caller easily recognized as the same Bobby had seen when, as the bogus messenger-boy, he had tried to deliver the note sent by Wainbridge.

Jim bowed politely.

"Is Hilga Ermstroff in?"

"I think so," was the reply.

"I would like to see her, if you please."

"I doubt if she will see you, or allow you to see her, but I will take your name, if you wish."

"Why should she refuse to see me?"

"She has declared that she would see no one, and has kept her word on the sole occasion when a caller has come."

"Why is that?"

"I don't know; she is peculiar."

"Well, please take my name, and I'll try my luck," and Jim presented a card which, however, did not bear his own name.

The landlady went to deliver it.

Jim waited impatiently, but his frame of mind was not improved when he caught sight of her face on her return. The answer was there, as well as in the words which followed.

"She declines to see you."

"Why?"

"She gives no reason, but declines, as she always has done in the past when any one called."

"Is there any other young lady who stops here?"

"No."

During this interview the landlady's face had borne a doubtful, uncertain expression which Jim saw and tried to analyze. He did not believe she understood Hilga Ermstroff, herself, and grew hopeful of getting some account of that mysterious person.

"Madam, will you allow me to ask you something about Miss Ermstroff?"

"What do you want to know?"

"When she came here, who she is, and, in brief, what you know about her."

"Are you her friend?"

"Emphatically, I am."

"Then come into the parlor and you shall hear the story. I am greatly puzzled over her, and would like the advice of one of her friends. I don't know what my duty is in the case."

"It is only seven or eight days," the speaker went on, when seated in the parlor, "since a carriage drove up here and two ladies alighted. A young girl who sometimes works here for me admitted them, and I was called to see them in this very room."

"As an introduction they presented a note, dated at Calcutta, India, and written by a gentleman who had a furnished room here, when in New York. He went to India only a few months ago."

"The note was an introduction of the two ladies, and a recommendation of them; and it wound up by saying that the writer thought I would find them very desirable tenants, unless I had filled my room. I had not, and I let it to them at once."

"You speak of two ladies," interrupted Jim. "Who was the second?"

"Her name was Lenore Bellaire!"

Little did the speaker suspect how forcibly that apparently simple statement fell on Jim's ears. It was no more than he expected, but, nevertheless, it was a striking revelation. He had moved on another step.

"She was the mistress, and Hilga Ermstroff was the maid," pursued the narrator, "but their relations as mistress and maid were only nominal. It seems they were warm friends, and

Hilga received a salary only because she was poor. Miss Bellaire was anxious to keep her friend with her, and it was done in that way."

"Miss Bellaire was a person who showed intimate acquaintance with the world. Her manner was modest, but there was a quiet decision in all she said and did which told that she had battled with the world until she felt fully capable of caring for herself. Hilga hardly spoke at all."

"The only condition they made which was not to my liking was that their meals should be served in their room, but as that was not going to make so very much trouble, I took them in. This was late in the afternoon of the day they arrived, and their baggage was not brought until the next morning."

"On that day they did not go out, but, in the afternoon, Miss Bellaire came down and asked if I had any camphor. Hilga was ill, being very nervous, and afflicted with a painful headache. I did not see her."

"Supper was carried to them as usual, and then I went out to make a call. It was late when I returned. The next morning, when I saw my young servant, she informed me that they had had a caller the previous evening."

"The servant took up their breakfast, but all her knocking at the door failed to bring any answer. After waiting awhile I went up personally, but did not get any notice until I left off rapping, and called out to know if they were ill."

"Then, after a pause, the door was unlocked. Hilga Ermstroff was standing there, but she only looked at me in a blank way. I asked her some commonplace question, and she answered directly enough, but in a machine-like way that showed me something was wrong. Yet, she said she was not ill."

"I asked where her friend was, and she said she was not there. Having good opportunity I pushed back the door, and saw that she had spoken the truth."

"Lenore Bellaire was not in the room!"

CHAPTER X.

THE WRONG MAN.

EAGERLY Jim Royal asked:

"Where was she?"

"That is just what I don't know," the landlady replied. "Lenore Bellaire was not in the room, and the fact that one of the pillows was unrumpled indicated that the bed had only one occupant during the night."

"Again I asked:

"Where is your friend?"

"Oh! she went away, last night," Hilga replied, carelessly.

"Where?" I asked.

"I don't know."

"When will she return?"

"I don't know."

"Like words from a machine were Hilga's answers, and I saw that the bright, intelligent expression of her face had given place to one vacant and dull. She was not like the same girl—"

"Are you sure it was the same girl?" Spotter Jim demanded, quickly.

"Oh! yes; I could swear to that. There is no mystery about Hilga, except the fact that she lives like a hermit. The two girls were no more alike than black and white. The question is: What became of Lenore Bellaire? I waited for her to come back, but she came not. Hours and days passed, and there was no sign of her. If I had known of any relatives I should have notified them, but I did not. It is very strange. From the time she left the house she seemed to vanish from human view. She went, but where? With whom? On what errand? All these questions I have puzzled over, for Hilga will tell nothing, but I am still in the dark. I hope no harm has come to Miss Lenore!"

If Jim had spoken his mind he would have told her that, in his opinion, the hope was vain.

The still form in the bay told its own story.

"How do you account for Hilga's odd ways?" he asked.

"Another puzzle. She is calm and quiet—melancholy, a trifle, at times, perhaps, but never seriously disturbed—and seems to feel no concern for the mistress and friend who was so kind to her. Whenever I question her she repeats that Lenore has gone out, but will soon return. That's all I can get from her."

"Does she often go out, herself?"

"Hilga?"

"Yes."

"She never goes out!"

Here was another surprise for him. He had decided that Hilga must be the Angel of the

Docks, but this statement did not help his theory on.

"Does she receive any young lady visitor?"

"No. She will see no one, and has not been out of her room in a week."

"You have no other young lady here?"

"No."

"You don't have any such person visit here at night?"

"Oh! no. Why do you ask?"

"You don't know of a young woman who is fond of prowling around the water-front at night so much so that she is called the Angel of the Docks?"

"Most certainly not."

"Madam, I am anxious to see Hilga, and if it will not be too much trouble to you, I'd like to have you take a message to her in these words: A friend of Lenore Bellaire is here and wishes to see her."

"I'll try it, but doubt if it will do any good."

The landlady went up-stairs, but soon returned.

"Hilga says she will not see you, and if you try to force your way in, she will shoot you!"

"The lady can keep her revolver where it belongs; I am not going to resort to such an extreme measure," Jim answered, quietly.

The landlady, like the executor, was anxious to know the meaning of the inquiry, but Jim managed to avoid revelations and, at the same time, avoid giving offense. He soon left the house, and went, too, in a greatly puzzled frame of mind.

What was the mystery surrounding Hilga?

It seemed plain enough that the unknown person, or persons, who had called the night when the landlady was out were the same who had lured one of the girls away, but why did the other remain under such mysterious circumstances? If friendly to the missing girl, why did she not give an alarm? If hostile, why did she remain at the place from which her late companion was lured, daring arrest?

Returning to Stumps and Bobby he made his report, and the three grappled with the new riddles.

Long and earnest was the discussion, though all were agreed on the point that it was Lenore Bellaire's body that had been found in the bay; that she had been foully dealt with by her enemies; and that, in all probability, these enemies were Captain Cheney Bellaire, Delno Wainbridge, and the active agents they had hired.

Stumps advised that all these facts be put in the hands of the police, but Bobby Blossom opposed the plan strenuously, and Jim more mildly.

Both wanted the full credit of exposing the evil-doers.

"Our next step is clear," added Jim. "We cannot afford to ignore the conduct of Barney McCurdy and Ira Ricketts. While these actions and words may be no more than coincidents in the drama, they fit in well enough to be worthy of investigation."

"You'd hev thought so ef you'd heerd them on the pier," Bobby exclaimed. "Ira was scared an' remorseful, an' he talked in husky whispers of a crime they'd done there, an' said he wondered the gal didn't rise up out o' the water an' accuse them; an' then when the Angel o' the Docks appeared, they jest run as ef a ghost was yankin' the tails off from their coats!"

"Beyond doubt they have done harm to some girl. The question is, are we too sanguine in believing it was Lenore?"

"Not a bit!" Bobby declared.

"I think it was that poor child," Stumps admitted.

"Then we must find Ira Ricketts. He is the man to work on, for his conscience and fears are active."

"But do you know where to find them?" Stumps asked.

"That is where the trouble comes in. The only clew is that, when I was on the street at a certain point, Ricketts was there and addressed me. Of course he may have been any number of miles from home, but the fact that the second man, who told me Ricketts's name, knew him, indicates that both lived near at hand. Ricketts's name is not in the Directory, but I hope by inquiring in the vicinity to learn where he holds forth."

"I think your plan 'll work."

"Can't I do it?" Bobby asked, quickly.

"Robert, you want all the work, seems to me. In this case it won't do; you know you are Delno's hired man."

"I cave!" the junior Spotter replied, with a grimace.

The day was well advanced before Jim got

away on his errand, and he saw that he would have to do some hustling to finish before dark. He went to where Ira had accosted him, but, on this occasion, he saw no wild-eyed man skulking in a doorway. For awhile he watched the people, pedestrians and corner-loafers, and then approached one of the latter.

"Sport, do you live around here?" he asked.

The rough-looking youth favored Jim with a long stare.

"Mebby! Why?" he asked.

"I'm looking for a man named Ira Ricketts."

"Et ain't me."

"Do you know of him?"

"Naw!"

"Or Barney McCurdy?"

"Naw!"

"I thought perhaps you did."

"Say, cully, w'ot d'ye tak' me fer, a Directory?" demanded the "tough" youth. "I don't keep no hotel register fer blokes ter write their names in. See? De biggest part o' my job is ter mind me own business, an' dat's w'ot I like ter see any man do. Dat's de way ter get along in dis world. See? No offense, old man; I'd like ter tell you's where de duffer lives, but I don't know. Mebbe he's over ter de Island. See? Well, so-long!"

The tough youth sauntered away, but left no especially unpleasant impression behind. He had talked like the class he represented, but not offensively, if he had been blunt.

Jim was not to be discouraged, and he asked other persons, men and women, about Ira Ricketts, but found no one who could tell of him; at least, so they said.

Time passed in this way until the detective began to feel like giving it up, but he was finally approached by a boy of about ten years who asked:

"Say, boss, is you de chap w'ot is lookin' fer Ira Ricketts?"

"Yes," Jim answered.

"Me big brudder says he's de chap as is known as Old Jerks, 'cause he's so nervous."

"Who's your brother, anyhow?"

"Oh! you asked him, a bit ago, but he didn't know Old Jerks's reel name, first off, but somebody told him w'en he had went away, an' he sent me ter tell you's, boss; an' I will tell you's ef you'll give me ten cents. Say, will you's do it?"

Jim had no disposition to refuse. The money was paid over, and the boy became guide. Two blocks away the latter turned into an alley.

"Old Jerks lives in yere wid Mother Meg," he explained. "He's an old bacheldoor an' ain't got no wife, Old Jerks is."

The young citizen seemed to be well up in local family history, and he marched along rapidly. The alley was narrow and dark, but they soon reached a court that was even worse to look at. Poverty and decay had a place there, and brooms and water had evilently been crowded to the rear.

"We'll go right in, fer Mother Meg never objects. Then I'll call her, an' she can take you's in charge an' run you's up, ter see Old Jerks. See?"

Jim saw, or thought he did, and sat down in the front room, to which the boy conducted him. Then the latter went out, but there was only a brief delay. A man entered, and, looking up, the caller saw with surprise that it was Delno Wainbridge.

The sport was very calm, and he carelessly brushed a spot of dust off from his coat.

"I am told that you want to see Ira Ricketts," he remarked, calmly. "Won't I do just as well?"

"Don't know that I have business with you," Jim returned, as quietly as possible.

"No? Well, I have business with you!"

The sport's lips parted in a smile ominous and menacing.

CHAPTER XI.

THE DRAWN REVOLVER.

JIM was by no means pleased to see Wainbridge, and he would have been dull not to foresee danger, but he met the sport's gaze calmly and asked:

"Are you Ira's friend?"

"Never mind. You and I are running this affair. I think I saw you when I called on the police?"

"When, and where, was that?"

"Don't play the innocent. I know you well, my man. You are called Jim, and aspire to work as a private detective. That means that you start out in life early as a blackmailer. You are not twenty-one, I judge. Too young to get your salt by squeezing money out of others."

There was something suggestive in Delno's manner, as well as in his words, and Jim suspected that it was a covert invitation to him to act the blackmailer; in other words, that Bellaire and Wainbridge had got trace of the movement against them, and were ready to pay the Spotter Trio for keeping their mouths shut.

"How have you got such an opinion of me?" he asked.

"Isn't it correct?"

"No."

"Then why are you prowling around, inquiring into other men's business?"

"Have I done this?"

"Yes."

"I don't admit it. We are now talking at random, sir. If you have anything of importance to say to me, be so good as to come to the point, at once."

"I will. I am aware that you are acting the spy on myself and certain of my friends. Your latest move, in hunting for Ricketts, is only one of a series of movements made by you and a certain Stumps, which have come to my attention."

"What is there between you and Ricketts?"

The sport waved his hand, as if thus to answer the question, and calmly proceeded:

"I don't like to have any one hounding me. A fellow may be as innocent as a Moses or an Aaron, but it don't look well to be dogged. Outsiders are liable to notice it and comment. My record is clear, but my friends would badger the life out of me if they knew of it; why, it might do me harm in business!"

Mr. Wainbridge looked the picture of an innocent and wronged man as he spoke.

"What do you want?" Jim asked, quietly.

"Protection! Of course life here in New York is all a game of see-saw, in which the police always get the best of it. You are only an amateur, but your pocket has a vacuum. In brief, what will you require to make a tour of Europe and—keep your mouth shut?"

"On what subject?"

Again the sport smiled blandly.

"Everything."

"My good sir, I am all at sea; I don't know what you are talking about. Will you enlighten me?"

"No more than I have."

"Then I don't see how we can trade. I don't know what you are driving at."

Jim was shrewd enough to suspect that the sport was trying to make him betray the exact extent of his information, but he was not foolish enough to fall into the trap. He did not believe, either, that Wainbridge was sincere in offering himself as a victim of blackmail. It appeared very foolish for him to propose it, and thereby admit that he had a guilty secret to conceal, and as he was not by any means a fool, the situation gave rise to the suspicion that the detective had been trapped, and that Delno thought escape so nearly impossible that he could afford to talk plainly.

The sport leaned forward and smiled.

"But you want to see Ricketts?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I will explain when I see him."

"You want to pump him?"

"Why should I?"

"That's it; why?"

"My errand is of the simplest kind. If you know where he is, I should be glad to see him."

"No doubt. Perhaps I can help you out. You want to see him, but he is not receiving visitors to-day. I'll attend to you, instead. Boy, you are a spy and a sneak. You are meddling with what don't concern you, and with the usual result; you've got into trouble!"

"In what way?"

"Ira Ricketts don't live here, but by inquiring for him you advertised yourself just where I heard of you. It was I who sent the boy; he lured you here, and here you are. Where Ricketts is I don't know. It don't matter; you and I are running this business."

Calmly the speaker drew a revolver from his pocket and laid it on his knee.

"Yes, we are doing this business!" he added.

"It is time for you to go further with your explanation," declared Jim, sharply. "You say you decoyed me here, and now you draw a revolver. What next?"

"Briefly, this: You are my prisoner!"

"I have not surrendered yet, and don't intend to. A course of intimidation will not work with me. Not having any business with you, I will retire. I warn you not to molest me."

The detective rose, and met with another unpleasant surprise. Between him and the door stood a burly ruffian; a man who, in fact, was Barney McCurdy. The rough was grinning in

that style peculiar to one of his class who feels that he has a dead sure thing.

"Take it easy," advised Wainbridge. "You see you can't go, and may as well make the best of it. In a fight I will turn my assistant in against any man I know; you would be a child in his hands. As to guns, you may have one, but before you could draw it I would shoot you down. Accept your fate and yield tamely; your spying days are over. We are not going to do you bodily harm, but our prisoner you are and shall remain. See?"

There was no use of making more words, and Jim realized it fully.

His work in the Bellaire case was known in whole or part, and the fight was on.

He decided to make the fight warm.

To pass McCurdy was simply out of the question, and he took the only other course open to him. Wainbridge's revolver was not bearing upon him, and then, if ever, was his chance. With long, quick steps he made for the second door of the room, one which led to the interior of the house.

"Stop!" Delno shouted.

The order was not heeded.

Jim reached and passed the door, but found himself in a dark, narrow hall, or passage. First of all he fell over a chair. This article broke audibly, and Jim was not sure but he was in the same fix; certainly, he was very much jarred and shaken up.

He rose and tried to go on, but it was running the gantlet under difficulties. There was an abundance of rubbish in the way, and he had no light to show which was the proper way to go.

Wainbridge and McCurdy were hastening after him, the former threatening to shoot.

The fugitive found a door and opened it. He passed the threshold and would have hurried on, but found a wall of wood on every side. He had entered a closet.

Alarmed at this state of affairs he turned back as soon as was possible, but stopped short at the door. The pursuers were at hand, and he could go no further.

Quickly he pushed the door nearly to, and then awaited the next turn of events.

"Whar is he?" McCurdy asked. "I don't see him."

"Do you expect to see in the dark, you fool?" Delno retorted. "Stop and listen! He must be near; he can't get out of here. Listen!"

There was a short silence, but Jim did not help them to solve the mystery of his hiding-place.

"The reptyle may hit us a smash in the jaw, first we know," finally growled McCurdy.

"You idiot! do you think he would dare this revolver? I would ask nothing more favorable than a chance to shoot him. Let him furnish the excuse, and I'll do it in a twinkling. But he won't. To hide is his game. Come out, you!"

The last words were in an elevated tone, but Jim did not "come out."

"You are only deferring your capture," Wainbridge pursued. "You can't escape, and it's folly to act like this. We are bound to have you. Will you surrender?"

He received no reply.

"Bah! this is childish, but we'll make him sweat for it, presently. McCurdy, remain here while I go for a light."

"No, no; I'll help you git it."

"You're afraid."

"Right, I be! I won't stay in the dark an' let him smash me in the head with a club. Not much!"

The prudent rough retreated with his leader, but Jim's position was not improved. The confidence of the men confirmed the opinion he had himself formed, that there was no outlet from the passage; and as Barney paused by the door, he could not retreat as he had come in. It was a most annoying and dangerous predicament, but he proceeded to make the best of it.

The closet was of medium size, but one-half was somewhat littered up by short boards that were leaned against the wall. Evidently, they had once formed a dry-goods case, and had been knocked to pieces.

Jim took two of these and used them to secure the door as well as possible. By putting one end against the door and the other against the opposite wall he had a barrier not easily overcome. Another board he found about the right size and shape for a club, and for that purpose he retained it. It might yet be useful, and he was determined not to surrender tamely.

The men returned, and it did not take Wainbridge long to decide where the fugitives was. He tried and shook the door, and then called out:

"Hallo, in there!"

Jim remained silent.

"Come out!"
Still no answer.
"Say, you, perhaps you think all this is fun for us, but it isn't. Why will you be such a fool? You've got to surrender, anyhow; why not do it at once, and get the benefit of our good will? You'll have to suffer, if you worry us."

Not a word came in reply.
"Confound you!" the sport cried, "come out of there, or I'll put a bullet through the panel of the door!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE TROUBLE IN THE CLOSET.

THE threat was alarming. A bullet would easily pass through the thin panel, and have force enough left to deal a fatal wound, perhaps, to any one beyond.

"Jest let me put my shoulder ag'in' it," McCurdy requested. "I kin flop that boy away from it like a musketer, let him brace ever so hard. Kids of his age ain't got the muscle that lays in my arms and shoulders."

"Go ahead!" Wainbridge directed.
McCurdy went ahead. He put his heavy shoulder against the door, and, grinning in anticipation of his triumph, essayed to open the barrier with a slow and steady push. The smile changed before the door did. The latter stood firm, but, as the rough struggled, his face grew red and angry.

"Are you going in, Mac?" Delno asked, sarcastically.

"Cuss it! that feller must be a corker!" growled Mac.

"Where is your boasted strength?"

"Here it is!"

Barney stepped back and flung himself heavily against the door, but without success.

"Let up!" the sport directed. "In some way he has made the door fast. A murrain on the bungler who deformed nature and custom enough to make the thing open inwardly. Say, inside, there! I am going to open on you right away, unless you surrender. It is for you to say whether you will part with your liberty or life. Unless you open the door and surrender I shall begin to shoot. How is it—will you surrender, or shall I blaze away?"

Ominous enough the threat sounded, but Jim was not sure that Wainbridge intended to keep it. Remote as they were from the street, and penned up within a house, it was by no means certain that he would dare to fire.

If the shot was heard it might lead to an investigation which, certainly, he would not like to meet.

In this lull on his part Jim had not been idle. He did not like the idea of remaining like a rat in a trap to meet whatever fate his enemies saw fit to allot him, and he had early considered the question, could he get out of the closet?

Owing to the age of the house the boards were warped and loose in places, but he had tried them at the sides in vain. It seemed out of the question to move them.

Only one way remained. The ceiling, like the walls were of unplastered boards, and he next investigated there. As in the former case, he found the boards to be loose, but when he tried to pull, push, or slip them out, he met with ill-luck. He was still working quietly, and standing on one of the boards he had used to brace the door, when a period of silence outside was rudely broken.

There was a tremendous shock, one of the door-panels came in, and after it came an ax.

Had the blow been delivered a little higher the ax would have struck Jim's legs. As it was the board used as a brace received the shock and was knocked out of place; and Jim, suddenly deprived of his support, fell over and broke the second prop in two.

The door flew open, and the men rushed in.

As quickly as possible Spotter Jim regained his feet. If the enemy had used due diligence they could have taken him before he did this, but they were a little too late. Barney McCurdy sprung forward, his huge fist raised for a blow, but Jim was thoroughly on the aggressive.

He struck out hard and skillfully, and Barney went over in a heap, in one corner.

Wainbridge then filled the breach and skillfully parried the same kind of a compliment that had felled his follower. Blows were exchanged rapidly, and it became evident that both contestants were well up in the art of boxing.

McCurdy rose with his hands clasped over one eye.

"Give it to him!" the rough roared. "Knock the lop-jawed young fiend inter fragments! Sail

inter him! 'Twas a cowardly blow he give me; I wa'n't lookin'. Climb all over him, Del! Why don't ye go in? Why don't ye do him up?"

There was good reason why Wainbridge refrained from giving the decisive stroke, and that was that he could not. He was trying his best, but found it impossible to pass Jim's scientific guard, while, on the other hand, he already had received several stinging blows.

"Go in!" repeated Barney, furiously. "Why don't you go in? Smash him! Smash—Oh! Outch!"

A clean under-cut had caught Delno off his guard, and over he went. If McCurdy had not been in the way some one would have been left to carry on business, but he was in the way—the sport's head struck Mr. McCurdy full in the stomach, and, barely leaving time for an ejaculation of pain, he again toppled over in the corner, this time with Delno on top of him.

"Howly Peter!" he groaned.

But Jim waited to hear no more. Energetic action, coupled with rare good luck, had opened the way of retreat, and he did not fail to take advantage of it. He ran out of the closet and along the passage.

Would any one be in the main room to oppose his departure?

It brought a feeling of great relief when, reaching that point, he found the way clear, and he hastened out of the house. He could hear shouts behind him which indicated that the enemy were again active, and he lost no time in making for the alley.

A few seconds later he was on the street—safe! For a moment he was tempted to call a policeman and ask that his late assailants be arrested, but desire to have all the glory of the Bellaire case rest where it certainly belonged, with the Spotter Trio, led him to resist the temptation.

Although the fight against Wainbridge and his tools was no longer a secret fight, Jim believed he was fully able to hold his own end up.

He went some distance away from the alley and waited to see if Delno and Barney would come out, but they evidently had got enough of it; they did not put in an appearance.

Willing to let matters rest, Jim walked away.

When he reached his room neither Stumps nor Bobby was there, but he found a note which proved to be from the landlady of the Delancey street house. It read, in its main part, as follows:

"A gentleman has just called here to see Miss Lenore Bellaire; said he came on the same vessel with her from Calcutta. I had to tell him Miss Bellaire had gone away, but that Hilga Ernstruff was in. I took his card up. It was the same old story; Hilga would not see him. He went away puzzled and, I am sure, chagrined, but was amiable enough to leave his name and address to give Miss Bellaire if she came back. It is M. D. Raynor, Grand Central Hotel. I explained nothing to him, but it seems to me it would be worth your while to call on him, if he came over from India with the ladies."

"Sure!" Jim declared, as he read the last words, and, after a glance at the clock, he hastened to the hotel.

He found Mr. Raynor in, and proceeded to business at once.

"I am told that you called on Miss Bellaire?"

"I did," the gentleman agreed, with some surprise.

"Did you know her well, on shipboard?"

"We were quite friendly, having been introduced before we left Calcutta."

"Did the refusal to see you, to-day surprise you?"

"It was not on Miss Ernstruff I called, and I care nothing for her refusal; we were not the best of friends during the voyage. But it surprises me that Miss Bellaire left the house without sending me any word, as I was distinctly invited to call. And I am rather puzzled to know why she left Hilga Ernstruff, as she seemed very much attached to her friend."

"Has it occurred to you that what you learned to-day may rise to the dignity of a real mystery?"

"I hardly understand."

"Miss Bellaire has disappeared, not gone away."

"Great heavens!" cried the ex-traveler, "has that uncle of hers done her harm?"

"What uncle? What do you mean?"

"I mean Captain Cheney Bellaire; a man against whom I warned her. And she had some doubts herself."

"Mr. Raynor, I am trying to solve the mystery of her disappearance, and would thank you very much to help me. I am in the dark on one point. Why did she come to New York? What is her history in detail?"

"I only know what little she revealed, from

time to time, as we came to New York, but shall be glad to tell what I know."

"She was the daughter of one Harper Bellaire, brother to Captain Cheney Bellaire. Both her parents died when she was a girl. Having a few hundred dollars, she practically reared herself in Calcutta."

"Two things she remembered hearing from her father's lips: First, that, in his opinion, the captain was a villain; second, that before Harper left New York he had bought a tract of Western land in copartnership with the said Captain Bellaire, but that, in all probability, the land was not worth looking after."

"A few months ago Miss Bellaire met in Calcutta a lady who had known Harper Bellaire well once, and Captain Cheney slightly. She informed Lenore that her uncle had become a very rich man, and, barring the little he had put by when a sea-captain, all through land in the West."

"This set Lenore to thinking. She got out the old deed and read it. It certified that, for a small sum, Harper Bellaire had acquired 'an undivided half' of the aforesaid land."

"Meditation brought about rash action on her part."

"As I have said, Harper Bellaire died with the belief that his brother was a villain. I will pause here to say that he died on an ocean island."

"When Captain Cheney was a sailor he once put into port and asked Harper, and the latter's wife and child—Lenore was then about five years old, I think—to take a pleasure voyage with him in the *Glideaway*."

"They went, and, in the course of time, touched at an island supposed to be uninhabited. They lay there three days. One hot afternoon Captain Bellaire proposed a stroll into the interior. They went; Harper and his wife and child became separated from the rest; a tropical tempest came up suddenly."

"Harper saw the ominous black clouds before the shock came, and, not being well informed as to how such things should be dealt with, hurried his wife and child toward the vessel."

"Finally they emerged from the jungle, but only to see the vessel a mile away, leaving the island with every sail set!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DECOY.

"THE scoundrel!"

Jim had been listening eagerly, and this emphatic exclamation came as he recognized the full measure of Captain Bellaire's villainy:

Mr. Raynor quietly went on:

"The tempest came and went. The '*Glideaway*' met it on the water; the deserted trio, on land. None of them ever saw the vessel again; it did not come back. Had it been lost in the storm, after putting out to sea as a precautionary measure to keep it from driving on the land, a wreck?"

"Harper Bellaire tried to believe this, but never succeeded. He was loth to do possible injustice, but died under the impression that it was a deliberate desertion."

"The helpless castaways did not starve. Fruit grew in abundance on the island, and, after all, it was not uninhabited land. A race of natives dwelt there, and they proved to be not only peaceful, but gentle and simple. Among them the Bellaires lived for years."

"Finally the father and mother died, and Lenore, aged about nine, if I remember rightly, was alone. But, fortunately, for only a few days. Another vessel touched there, and she was taken to Calcutta."

"She had no one to urge her rights, and, having no wish to look up the uncle who was either dead or a villain, she remained in Calcutta."

"But, as I have before said, when she heard that the captain was alive, and rich, she made what proved to be a rash move, I fear. She wrote to him and inquired about her father's share of the Western land."

"When the proper time came she looked for a letter. Instead, a man made his appearance who said he had come from New York at Captain Bellaire's bidding."

"He gave verbal messages to Lenore, from her uncle, to this effect:

"The ex-captain was astonished and delighted to hear that the niece he had for many years supposed dead was alive, and, though the Western land had been closed out at cost, only, she was heir to all he—Captain Bellaire—had otherwise accumulated; and he urged her to come to New York and gladden his home."

"Lenore decided to answer the call."

"The messenger was to accompany her back as a protector, but when the steamer left port he failed to show up, and was left behind."

"I found Miss Bellaire on shipboard, a charming young lady, but in a mood of doubt and distrust. Not over-confident at the first, the failure of the messenger to set out with her raised fears in her mind—though I fully believe it was a genuine case of a man having missed his vessel by accident."

"All this Lenore told me, a little at a time, as we came on the long voyage, until I had the whole story; and her doubts grew so that, having the address of the Delancey street house, which was given her by a friend in Calcutta, she decided to go there first, rather than venture recklessly to Captain Bellaire's residence."

"I offered her the shelter of my mother's home, at Binghamton, but she naturally thought it too far away to be considered."

"If, as I fear from your manner, harm has come to her, I deeply regret that I did not insist upon acting as her protector, here, but business of urgent nature required my presence in Binghamton."

"Tell me, do you think anything is wrong with her?"

Jim listened with deep interest to this recital of the past, and when it was done he believed there were but few mysteries not explained.

To him it seemed clear that Cheney Bellaire, a villain at the start, had sold his soul for worldly gain; that he had lured Lenore to New York and made way with her.

What need, in the light of such evidence, to ask if the body found in the bay was that of an unknown?

Meredith Raynor was anxiously waiting a reply, and Spotter Jim slowly returned:

"I do think there is!"

"What do you think has happened?" Raynor demanded.

"The worst, I'm afraid."

"Surely, you don't mean—"

"Tell me one thing: Did you ever notice, when coming from Calcutta here, a peculiar ring on her hand?"

"She wore a ring which had been her mother's; a ring with an odd device, representing two tiny crossed swords, with five diamonds set therein."

"That settles it!"

"And what of her?"

"I guess you haven't read the New York papers closely."

"I have not; I have been too busy."

"Her story is told there; the last chapter of her life."

Raynor looked startled.

"Do you mean all that your words seem to indicate?"

"Yes. Lenore Bellaire has lost her life, and I believe it was at the hands of her uncle."

Jim then told as much of the story as he thought necessary, and a full discussion followed.

"You are undoubtedly right in all your conclusions," Raynor agreed. "Lenore has fallen victim to a great conspiracy. I have an idea that it was not intended she should reach New York, at the first. Contracted as a ship is, it is not the worst place to commit crime. Suppose a person is lost overboard, that's the last of her. Or if a would-be murderer failed to get that chance, he poisons his victim early in the voyage. She must be buried at sea, and an elaborate post-mortem examination is generally impossible. I believe this was the plot in the present case, but when the agent missed the vessel at Calcutta the battle-ground was transferred to New York. Then the work was done quickly and effectually."

"But Hilga? What of her?"

"I don't know."

"Why is she a hermit?"

"I can't imagine."

"I see only one theory."

"And that?"

"Is that she has gone insane. Lenore's troubles have had more or less effect on her; I have a vague idea that she may have been witness to the violent end of her mistress. Friendly as the two girls were, such a thing naturally would be a great shock. It is not strange she lost her reason."

"And the Angel of the Docks?"

"Hilga, of course."

"But her landlady says she never goes out."

"That's where she is in error. Hilga does go out, and goes to the docks; to that one pier where Lenore met her fate. Circumstances go to show that, acting under orders from Captain Bellaire and Wainbridge, McCurdy and Ricketts decoyed Lenore there, and that Hilga was along and saw the deed done. Since then Hilga

has been eccentric, simply because the shock was too much for her reason."

"Your reasoning is clear. Well, shall I go and identify the body, formally?"

"Wait until to-morrow. A little delay can do no harm, and I want to make one more effort on the Angel of the Docks, to-night. If possible, I desire to make a clear case of it before divulging to the police what I know already."

"That's natural, and I will co-operate with you fully."

Jim soon left the house, but had gone only a few yards when a tall young man approached. Nodding affably he inquired:

"Isn't your name Jim?"

"Yes."

"Thought so; I've seen you before. I know Stumps well. He wanted me to tell you he's around at Painter's saloon, No. 299 — street, and wants to see you. Know where it is?"

"No; but the number will direct me."

"All right; that's enough. Say, couldn't we friends of Stumps make up a subscription to get him a better false leg than he uses? That old one looks uncomfortable. Would you subscribe?"

"Yes."

"All right; I'll see you again about it. No, 299. Fine weather, ain't it? So-long!"

The tall youth hurried away as if lost with driving business, and Jim, whose mind was wholly upon the his detective case, walked mechanically toward No. 299. Suddenly, however, he stopped short. He was approaching the objective point, and his thoughts returned to the present enough to raise the inquiry, If Stumps wanted to see him, and knew where he was, why didn't he come there in person, instead of sending a messenger who, it seemed, had run upon the wanted person only by chance?

"Another trap, or I'm no judge!" Jim exclaimed. "It has been started in an airy, off-hand way, but the cloven hoof shows. Stumps never sent the message, and is not in the saloon. The opposition is up and working, and if I went into that saloon I never should see Stumps in the land of the living, perhaps. I'll have a look at the place, however."

He went nearer and saw the saloon, and all of his doubts received confirmation. It was on the first floor of an old building, and the whole place and its surroundings smacked of the typical "dive."

Jim decided most emphatically that he would not keep the appointment, but while he was considering the matter he saw a man approaching who was no stranger to him. It was a policeman in citizen's clothes; a man he had known for years. He accosted him at once.

"O'Rourke, I want you to do me a favor. I have been invited to call at yonder saloon, and believe that the apparently harmless invitation hides a trap. Will you go in, instead, and see who is there?"

"With pleasure, me boy; but as for the saloon, I know it of old. It is a den of crime. Who is trying to lure you?"

Jim told enough to satisfy his friend, and the latter went in. He returned in a short time puffing a cigar, which he threw away as soon as he reached Jim.

"Well?" the latter questioned.

"Curtain lowered next to the rear room; sure sign of mischief afoot. I sauntered close to it, and got a secret, brief look inside. Two men were there. One of them I know; he is a sport and bucket-shop keeper. The name he sails under is Delno Wainbridge!"

More direct evidence could not be asked for, and when Jim left his friend and walked homeward, he had cause to congratulate himself on his caution. The incident, too, showed how active the enemy were; they were determined to silence him at all hazards.

Constant danger would menace him until they were caged.

When he reached home he found, as he had expected, that Stumps was there, calm and composed.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE NIGHT OF THE TRAGEDY.

WHILE Jim Royal was making discoveries, Stumps had not been idle. He had been out on a general expedition, which included a look at Captain Bellaire's house. He found that, while the ex-sailor was not in an aristocratic neighborhood, he had a good home, and seemed to be taking life easy.

Stumps wondered, as he looked at the building, whence came the money that had purchased it.

He was on his way home when he saw a man on the street whose movements were so peculiar

as to attract his attention. The man was not hurrying, but he had a secret, skulking air, and seemed to be afraid of some one or something. With attention thus directed to him, Stumps was impressed with another fact.

The man's appearance exactly agreed with the descriptions given of Ira Ricketts.

Making a sudden decision, Stumps accosted him:

"Hallo, Mr. Ricketts!"

The other pedestrian started and looked frightened, but calmed down at sight of the speaker's mild and dignified face.

"Come over on a bench in the Park," Stumps added. "Let's hev a talk over old times."

"I don't know you," was the uncertain reply.

"No? I think I can recall myself ter yer mind. Let's try it, anyhow; no great amount o' time will be wasted."

As his manner continued mild the second man made no objection, and they were soon on the bench.

"You ain't lookin' well, Ira," Stumps pursued.

"I ain't wal."

"Wot's the matter? You seem nervous, an' all broke up."

"I be."

"Why?"

"Iscaria."

"Can't sleep, eh? Somethin' on yer mind, is there? I hope you ain't got into trouble by consortin' with Barney McCurdy an' Delno Wainbridge?"

It was a bold move, but Stumps felt that he could get at the facts only by frightening his companion; the latter would hardly be coaxed into telling criminal secrets to a stranger. That he had succeeded in causing the fright was at once apparent, for Ricketts gazed at him in the utmost dismay.

"Ira," the speaker pursued, "the best thing you kin do is ter own right up in this case. McCurdy is placin' you in a dangerous position. You are the least guilty of the whole lot, but ef you hang off an' wait fer the wholesale arrest, the law will hold you jest as bad as t'others. On the other hand, ef you tell the facts an' save the perleece trouble, I ain't sure you'll be prosecuted at all. Now, you ain't so bad as them—"

"I didn't know anybody was to be harmed!" Ira broke in, excitedly.

"Jes' my idee."

"I never was in a scheme like it afore, an' ef I'd 'a' known how it was ter end, I wouldn't 'a' been in that."

"Jes' as I suspected. Wal, Ira, you're foolish ter let yerself be sacrificed. You ought ter move while there's time, tell yer story an' git the perleece ter let ye off easy."

"Would they do it?"

"Sure!"

"I'll tell you all about it, an' let you advise me!"

For several days Ira had been in a most unhappy frame of mind, and terribly frightened. He had felt, too, that it would be a blessed relief to pour out his guilty secret to some one's ears; to relieve his mind of the awful burden, and hear the voice of sympathy. Now, as before, the impulse was strong within him, and he forgot that Stumps was an entire stranger. He remembered only that the latter had spoken encouragingly and kindly to him, and words were figuratively tumbling over each other in his mind, in their eagerness to find exit at the gate—his mouth.

"I'm mixed up in an awful affair," he declared.

"The Bellaire case, you mean?"

"Yes."

"Tell me all about it, Ira," Stumps persuasively requested.

"I will. It was like this: I was out o' work, ragged, hungry an' desperate. Barney McCurdy come ter me an' said there was a chance ter make money; that a rich man would pay well ef he could git a certain person out o' sight. The plan was fer her ter be lured ter a pier, an' then Barney, an' me, an' Delno Wainbridge, was ter take her in a boat an' carry her to a prison they had fixed up over in Williamsburg."

"At first I said I wouldn't do it, but a man ain't sure wot he will, an' won't, until he gits dead-hungry."

"Barney said Cap'n Cheney Bellaire, who was back of it all, was rich an' would see us safe through. The gal ter be kidnapped was Lenore Bellaire, his niece, who was with a friend, Hilga Ermstraff, on Delancey street."

"Wal, I yielded an' agreed ter help. I made out from their talk that Lenore had lately come ter town, and advantage was ter be took o' the fact that she knew nothin' about the city. The pretense was ter be ter hev her got ter her uncle's

house, ter meet the family lawyer, who was ter draw up papers; but, really, we was ter lure her ter the river, an' take her away.

"One night McCurdy an' I was at a certain pier, an' there we waited nigh the boat.

"Wainbridge was ter be the decoy, an' bring her in a cab.

"They come, at last, an' she got out, but when she see the low, mean street, an' the docks, an' the river beyond, she was scared; an' she rebelled right off.

"Then Wainbridge put on the screws. He told her blunt an' plain that she was a pris'ner, but that no harm was ter be done her, only she was ter be shut up a while.

"She made a big remonstrance, but it didn't do no good. Wainbridge was cool as ice, but his voice had a ring that scared her all the more when he cautioned her that ef she called fer help or resisted, no pity would be showed her.

"Finally, she yielded an' was led out on the pier, but when she got there an' see the water flowin' so black, all her nerve went back on her. Scared more than ever, she tried ter call fer help, but McCurdy gripped her throat an' shut off the cry.

"'Twas a cruel thing ter do, fer he was a big, strong man, an' she as delicate as gal could be.

"When she see her life was in danger she said she would yield, an' we prepared ter lower her inter the boat, but she wa'n't ready ter give up. Just when we wa'n't lookin' she made a dive for liberty, an' she'd got away, too, only she struck her foot ag'in' somethin' an' tripped.

"She fell headlong inter the water!

"The awfulness o' the situation paralyzed me, an' when Wainbridge ordered me an' McCurdy ter git down inter the boat an' save her, I couldn't stir. Wainbridge went, instead.

"Lenore was not found; we looked long an' carefully, but it wa'n't no use. She was drowned.

"We give it up an' made haste ter git away. I was almost wild with horror an' fear, an' Wainbridge an' McCurdy argued an' threatened me both, ter git up my nerve an' make me say I'd never give them away.

"I said it, but what d'ye s'pose the first thing I did when they left me was?

"Lenore had a latch-key which she dropped after gettin' out o' the cab, an' I had picked it up. The hour was late, but I was bound her friend should know what had happened. I went ter the house, see a light up-stairs an' decided it was her room, an' there she was waitin' fer Lenore ter come back. I didn't ring, but used the latch-key, opened the street-door, went up-stairs an' knocked.

"The door was opened by a slender gal.

"I asked her ef she was Hilga Ermstroff, an' she said she was. Then I poured out my story. Do you know, she listened with a manner as calm as mine was excited. I thought then, an' do now, that she wasn't sorry Lenore was drowned. She was cool an' quiet as you please, but ef she hadn't betrayed her heartless nature, I'd hev liked her—she was polite an' meek as could be.

"In a business-like way—I never see so odd a woman, before—she remarked that she'd like ter see the spot where all this took place, an' asked me ter guide her there. I agreed, an' we went out.

"Of course I s'posed she'd take a cab, but she said no, an' I'll be shot ef we didn't walk all the way.

"She tripped along by my side, light ez a fairy, never sayin' much, an' then in a quiet, easy way which made a sharp contrast ter me, with the blood rushin' like fire through my veins.

"When we got ter the pier she looked the whole place over, an' I explained until she knew as much about it as I did. She listened to all closely, but didn't show no grief 'cause Lenore was drowned, an' no feelin' at all.

"Even then, when I was so wrought up, I wondered amazin' at it; sence, I've wondered more than ever.

"When she had seen enough I walked home with her. She bid me good-night at the door as easy an' gentle as possible jest as ef we had been on a common errand, an' then went in. But I wa'n't so cool as her. I went home, an' my fancy riz up an' enemy in ev'ry shadder. Fear an' remorse pounced on me like vultures, an' gnawed at my vitals; fear o' the law, an' horror that I should be concerned in such a crime.

"One night I got an awful scare. I had dreamed that the dead gal was floatin' in the dock, an' told McCurdy about it, an' said I's afraid it was true. He declared I was a fool, an' insisted on us goin' there ter see it was not so. I

shrunk from goin', but he was bound it should be so, an' we went.

"We had an awful time. As we stood there Lenore's ghost riz up out o' the water and spoke to us. McCurdy was as scared as I was, an' we run fer our lives, an' never hev been back. Think of it!—we see the drowned gal's ghost!"

Ira looked at Stumps with terror and dismay expressed in his face.

"Did McCurdy say it was a ghost?" Stumps asked.

"He thought so, then, but when he had calmed down, he said it was some other livin' gal."

"Did you see her face?"

"No; the night was too dark."

"Ain't it possible it was not Lenore, but Hilga? You showed Hilga the way there—mightn't she hev gone ag'in, alone?"

Ira meditated, and then faint hope appeared in his face.

"It is jest possible. The ghost was like Hilga, slight an' slender, while Lenore was a bit stouter. But I don't think it; I think 'twas a ghost!" Ira persisted.

"Mr. Ricketts, you've spoke up like a man an' let an awful secret off yer mind. Now, instead o' goin' back ter McCurdy an' reskin' voylence at his hands, why not go with me ter them who'll stand by you in this case?"

"I'll do it!" Ira agreed.

CHAPTER XV.

WHAT HER FACE DID.

IN consequence of the interview between Stumps and Ricketts, Spotter Jim did not find the former alone on his return. Ira was there, and the story he had told to Stumps was repeated to the more active member of the Spotter Trio.

Jim fully comprehended the value of the statement. The missing link was found, and it only remained to order the arrest of Bellaire, Wainbridge and McCurdy.

This they decided to do the following morning. It was somewhat late, then, to get a warrant, and, besides, Jim had something he wished to do that evening. If, as seemed to be the case, the Angel of the Docks was in the habit of going to the pier every night, he wished to see her.

She might refuse to see him in the Delancey street house, but would hardly have so much authority on the pier. Moreover, she had always been talkative enough when in that section.

Bobby Blossom put in an appearance, and, on learning of the intended expedition, declared that he was going along.

"It wouldn't be proper fer you ter speak ter a gal you don't know," he explained, "but I kin introduce you, an' be yer chaperon. See?"

The request was not refused, and Jim and Bobby journeyed to the pier. First of all they called upon Pete Tiernan and borrowed a lantern, and Mr. Tiernan agreed, too, to be on the watch so that if he was wanted he could give his aid. The Angel might be contrary, unless she was a genuine angel, and the good will she felt toward him would bridge that gulf, they thought.

Bobby concealed the lantern under his jacket, and they took position where they would not be discovered readily.

"I hope, Jeems," observed Robert, with a mischievous turn of fancy, "you will behave wal on this occasion. Kinder watch me fer tips, an' ef you git stuck, take me off ter one side an' ask fer p'inters. You know I hev been associatin' with this Angel fer some time, while you don't know no more about angels than you do about the folks who live in the moon. Angels don't take ter you!"

"Your success with this one is all owing to the fact she never has seen you except in the dark."

"My classic phiz goes in all weather, mister."

"Especially, that part of it called tongue."

"Yes, Jeems, but it don't wag between sech cast-iron cheeks as some I've seen."

"The exception should be in a museum."

"I'll try ter get ye a job."

This good-humored war of words ended as Jim suddenly touched the boy's arm.

"Look!" he directed.

From the street came two men who, after looking around, deliberately concealed themselves only a few yards from the two detectives.

"Wot's up?" Bobby asked, in a low voice.

"I believe it's lucky we are here."

"Why?"

"Unless I am greatly in error, those men are Delno Wainbridge and Barney McCurdy."

"Yowlin' cats!"

"Their presence here does not mean any good," Jim continued, rapidly, "and I think I see just the evil it foretells. They are here to see the Angel of the Docks! Wainbridge's hard

head has taken no stock in the ghost theory, and he is here, I suspect, to see her. Very likely he mistrusts it is Hilga, and means to get her out of the way, so she can't testify against them in regard to lost Lenore."

"The p'izon skunks don't count on us, b'gosh!"

"Bobby, is it possible for you to get to Tiernan's house, so as to be sure of his instantaneous aid?"

The junior Spotter meditated for a moment.

"You bet!" he then returned. "I'll jest climb down off the pier, swim down the river a bit, and then come 'round ter Peter's from the other side."

"Do you want to risk it?"

"Resk it?" retorted Bobby, indignantly.

"Great singin' parrots! wot d'ye take me fer? I'm three quarters fish, an' the rest walrus."

"Go on, Robert; go on!"

Bobby lowered himself to the water, and did it with such skill that no sound followed. Jim saw him swim away in the darkness, and then awaited the critical moment.

Nearly half an hour passed, and then he saw a female figure leave the street and advance along the pier. He at once noticed the slender form and light, airy movement mentioned by others as characteristic of the Angel of the Docks, and felt sure she was on the scene. He noticed, too, a stir on the part of the ambushed men, and rightly conjectured they were not less observing.

They gathered themselves up, and, as she came nearer, moved quietly out of ambush and approached her. Jim also moved; he quickly changed to their late hiding-place, thus getting within a few feet of the group. Much to his relief, moreover, he saw the dark forms closing in from the direction of Tiernan's house, and knew his allies would be at hand to support him.

"Good-evening!" began Wainbridge, blandly.

The Angel of the Docks looked at him calmly.

"Good-evening," she returned, in a matter-of-fact way.

"Are you looking for any one?"

"Perhaps," she replied, showing some reserve.

"May I ask whom?"

"I don't care to say, sir."

"Did you just come from Delancey street?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I think we know the party you want to find. We will take you to her, if you wish."

"But she was drowned."

"Oh! no; that was a false report. She decided not to come here, and went to the Fifth Avenue Hotel, instead. She is now stopping with friends in a private house, and wishes to see you. It is only a few steps from here."

"I know that is false, for she did come here. A man brought me here, the same night, and explained how she was drowned," the Angel declared, with sudden spirit.

Wainbridge did not have an answer ready. He and McCurdy had never known of Ira Ricketts's act after the tragedy, but the things which had puzzled them began to assume shape. The sport was shrewd enough to ask the question, mentally, Had Ira really brought Hilga there? He exchanged glances with his confederate. It was their intention to abduct her, and the necessity became more imperative.

"My dear lady," he continued, "what I ask is for your good, but I must insist upon it. I am an officer of the law, a detective, and must do my duty. You will have to go with me!"

He reached out and grasped her arm, but at that moment there was a sudden and startling diversion. Darkness abruptly gave place to light, and the faces of the trio were distinctly made visible, one to the other. For the first time, the Angel of the Docks was plainly seen.

To Wainbridge this was the least important part of the interruption; the blaze of light so close at hand revealed the fact that they were interrupted; and this made plain the further fact that he might have a fight to attend to.

His hand sought a concealed revolver, but it was not drawn.

At that juncture Barney McCurdy gave a yell of terror and fell prostrate, and there he lay in convulsions, foaming at the mouth and writhing like an animal in its death-throes.

The fresh interruption was unexpected, and to Delno it was startling. He saw himself deprived of his ally, and other men were about, and McCurdy's appearance was such that the last remnant of the sport's courage vanished.

Turning, he ran away at full speed.

"Let him go!" exclaimed Jim Royal, quickly; and with this cue to his associates, he made haste to quiet the Angel, soothingly saying: "Lady, do not be alarmed; you are with those who are your friends, and will protect you."

"But I am alarmed; terribly alarmed."

She pressed her hands to her fast-throbbing heart, and gazed only at the writhing rough.

"Come to the house, and good Mrs. Tiernan shall care for you. Believe me, we are your friends."

"Sure, leddy, we're yours till death," declared Peter Tiernan, fervently.

The hold he had gained upon her confidence in previous visits to the pier was of great benefit now. Quickly she put her hand in his, with child-like trust.

"Take me away!" she implored.

"We will follow presently," Jim added. "Go on, Peter!"

The longshoreman went with the Angel, while Jim and Bobby looked again at the now quiet rough.

"He fell in a fit," Jim muttered. "I don't understand it."

"I sneaked over an' got the lantern," added Bobby, "an' it was when I uncovered it, and turned the light on, that he yelped out an' went down. The Angel did it!"

"Sight of her face!" the senior detective amended.

"Right! James, kin it be she is a real angel, an' that 'twas that scared him so when he got a good look at her?"

"I don't know. There is more here than I can grasp. I am puzzled, uncertain. Only one thing is certain; at sight of her face he fell in a fit!"

Bobby Blossom looked in wonder at his companion. He was not quite old enough to realize how deep a mystery it was to more-thoughtful Jim Royal.

The latter aroused. He did not intend to let McCurdy go free, and was not prepared to tell enough about him to request his arrest, then. They lifted and carried him into Tiernan's house, and there he was securely bound and stowed away.

Then they joined the others.

Mrs. Tiernan had quieted and composed the Angel in a measure, but the latter's mind still dwelt upon the rough. Spotter Jim would gladly have left her alone, but he felt the need of immediate action, and he questioned her in the most delicate and gentle way imaginable.

She answered everything, but not once answered satisfactorily. The information that she did not know was given to almost every effort to learn anything of value, while her manner continued as mild and docile as ever. Jim could arrive at but one conclusion. Something was wrong with her mind; the past had been so nearly obliterated that it was only a vague recollection, and what was recalled was of no value.

"She needs help more than we do," he finally said, impressively. "She must have a first-class doctor, and have him at once. I think, my good friends, you will be willing to let her stay here?"

"Sure, an' it will be a blessed privilege!" cried Mrs. Tiernan.

And Peter echoed the reply.

While the older members of the party were giving all their attention to the Angel, Bobby Blossom had an idea and accosted the senior member of the Spotter Trio.

"Stumpsey," he observed, "I s'pose we'll hev nothin' but sleepin' ter do, the rest o' the night."

"It wouldn't be much use ter pursue Wainbridge," Stumps decided. "We don't know where he will go, an' ef he kept his legs a-flyin' as he set out ter do, he's over in Hoboken afore now. It won't pay ter hunt."

"What ef there's no need of it?"

"Eh?"

"S'pose D. Wainbridge should come here?"

Stumps caught the idea and looked thoughtful.

"Deino sees his little game in danger," Bobby added, "an' ef he's got pluck an' curiosity like most folks, I think he will perambulate back. An' ef he gets the notion that his little game, aforesaid, is in a bad way, w'ot ef he puts on war-paint?"

"Bobby, fer a head of its size, yours is a good one," he of the wooden leg replied, approvingly. "Et would be resky fer us all ter go ter sleep like clams. I guess two on us had better keep watch, an' them two must be us."

"Stumpsey, you're a brick. Put it there! Now, le's waitz out an' take position fer work. We want ter be mighty sly."

They left the house and secured position where they could watch all that occurred in the vicinity. The more they meditated on the point the more convinced were they that some demonstration was to be expected.

Bobby's eyes were of the sharpest kind, and he suddenly touched Stumps's arm.

"Look at the skulker!" he directed.

Stumps looked where the boy's finger pointed, and he distinctly saw a man who certainly was not a patrolman. He was moving along the street in a furtive manner, and his face was turned toward Tiernan's house.

"The pot is b'ilin'!" Bobby commented. "Great pipin' parrots! but ain't there a prospect o' fun? I used ter think when Jim Royal was an actor he was away up in G, but he did wal ter quit the stage; et ain't a marker ter this detective biz. Git onter his jags!"

The person thus flippantly referred to now dodged into a doorway, and there was a full of several minutes.

"Pipin' the house," Stumps murmured. "Wal, it's quiet enough so they will be encouraged ter go ahead with their plot. Let 'em do it; the sooner the better. He's goin'!"

The spy left his covert and skulked away on the back-track.

Stumps and Bobby only waited to let him get out of sight. Then they quickly re-entered the house and notified Jim Royal of the latest developments. It was no surprise to the leader of the Trio, and arrangements were at once made for receiving the enemy, if they came, in what Bobby termed "a warm and sociable way."

Tiernan was added to the defense, and all armed themselves with clubs.

They had not long to wait. The skulker came back, and with him were two other men. They concealed themselves near the house while the patrolman passed, and then came stealthily forward. One was recognized as Wainbridge; the others were doubtless toughs he had picked up somewhere for the occasion.

After a little investigation they selected a rear window as a suitable place for operations, and the work began. They had an ax, and the blade of this was inserted under the lower sash.

They began an effort to raise the sash.

When the window began to show signs of yielding, the door was quickly unlocked, and Jim and Tiernan stood ready to rush out. Stumps was posted by the window, and it was his part to use a club, there.

Finally the weak fastening gave away, and one of the housebreakers raised the sash.

"Now, go slow!" came the caution, in Wainbridge's voice. "We don't want any disturbance. Light the dark-lantern, skulk through the rooms, see what is there, and then act accordingly. Now, Mr. What's-your-name, go in!"

One of the strangers grasped the window-sill, raised himself, and began to crawl through.

Then something happened!

Down came Stumps's club, and the intruder gave a gasp and dropped back outside.

This was the signal for the others to act, and Jim and Tiernan dashed out. They went at the remaining marauders like a cyclone, and the clubs began to rise and fall. Every blow told. At first Wainbridge and his follower, surprised and dismayed as they were, made an effort to meet the storm, but the onslaught was too fierce.

Bruised, bewildered and disheartened they turned and fled.

The victory was won!

CHAPTER XVI.

SEEKING TO IDENTIFY HER.

THE day was still young, when, the next forenoon, Jim called on Meredith Raynor. The latter greeted him cordially.

"I am glad you have come. I want to see the drowned girl, and definitely settle the question of whether she was Lenore Bellaire—if I can. So much time has elapsed that identification may not be easy. The many mistakes made in other cases which the newspapers have recorded from time to time show how easy it is to be mistaken. But in this case I think there is one means that will not fail."

"What is that?"

"Lenore one day showed me a scar on the side of the fore-finger of her left hand, between that finger and the next, where no one would be likely to see it by chance. I rely much on that scar. Is there anything new?"

"Hilga Ermstroff is in our hands."

"As a prisoner?"

"Oh! no; as a ward and patient. We have had a doctor to her. He was confessedly much puzzled over the case, but said there was a shock to the nervous system. To meet the troubles of such a case he last night gave her a powerful sedative. This morning she is much improved, and, for the first time, reason is at work in her mind."

"What did she say?"

"That she does not know where Lenore is."

"But what of her visits to the pier where you believe Lenore was drowned?"

"We cannot answer the question, yet. I think we shall get more from Hilga, soon, for the doctor gives the opinion that a few hours more under quieting drugs, and due nourishment, will work wonders. I have visited the girl's room at Delancey street, but discovered nothing."

By this time Raynor was ready to go out, and they left the house. During the journey Jim found confirmation of what he had suspected before—that his companion felt more than ordinary interest in Lenore.

Raynor grew nervous and troubled.

This condition of affairs increased when they entered the house of death, and the strong young man was singularly pale when they stood by the drowned girl.

Jim watched him closely.

The covering was raised from the still face, which was revealed to the would-be identifier. He started, made as if to turn away, then looked intently. Surprise, doubt and uncertainty were pictured in his face. Then came a sudden change, and he turned quickly to the detective and exclaimed:

"It is not Lenore!"

"Not Lenore?" Jim echoed.

"No."

"Are you sure?"

"Perfectly! This girl had darker hair, a face wider between the cheek-bones, and more of masculine-like strength and vitality. I know it is not Lenore!"

"Then who is it?"

"I don't know. So much time has elapsed that it would be very hard to identify the face, but the signs I have mentioned are not to be disputed."

"The hand?—look for the scar!"

Raynor obeyed, and then his face grew brighter even than before.

"The scar is not there!" he declared.

Jim stood in silence. Had all his work been done for nothing? Had he worked on a clew wholly false? Perhaps; but—he did not believe it. While Raynor still stood in puzzled attention, the Spotter aroused and took his arm. A vague idea had been in Jim's mind. Before, it had been too wild to be entertained; now, it was well worth consideration.

"Come!" he directed. "We want this matter settled as soon as possible. By this time it may be possible. If Lenore is not dead, Hilga knows where she is. We will go to Hilga."

"But is her mental condition such as to render information possible?"

"The doctor confesses that he does not know what has been the matter with her, but says her ailment had reached a point where sedatives were of vast value. When sedatives were given she improved with singular rapidity. She may be more improved now. Let us go to her!"

They went.

Mrs. Tiernan was watching the patient within the care of a mother, and when the visitors arrived she carried the message to her. Very soon she returned with the answer:

"Sure, she says she'll be roight glad ter see Mr. Raynor," the good woman explained.

"For once," murmured Meredith, "I feel an interest in Hilga. I never liked her, but if she can tell me of Miss Bellaire she will make me her best friend."

They entered.

Upon the humble bed lay the Angel of the Docks, and any one who had not seen her since she went under medical treatment would have been surprised to see how much brighter she looked, and how intelligence had made gain in her expression.

But it was not this which caused Meredith Raynor to stop short and look in amazement nor yet this which made his face light up with joy as he exclaimed:

"Lenore!"

The Angel of the Docks put out her hand and smiled.

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Raynor," she replied.

"But I thought—I thought—"

"I find I am addressed as Hilga Ermstroff, and perhaps you expected to see her. I am not she, as you see, and I do not know where she is. As near as I can learn she has disappeared—where, I know not."

Jim could not doubt that Lenore Bellaire was found. Her own mind was clear, and there was no hesitation in Raynor's recognition.

The young detective did not hurry matters, and, when the reunited friends had conversed

for awhile, it was Raynor who asked her to explain what had happened since he saw her.

"There is much which I cannot explain," she returned, thoughtfully. "I have been ill, both physically and mentally, but chiefly the latter. No one is so much at loss to understand as I, but I will explain all I can."

"When I left you, after our ship reached New York, Hilga and I went at once to Delancey street. We entered upon life there with a deception on our part."

"I had felt distrust of my uncle, though it was offset by a feeling that, even if he were so disposed, he could not harm me in New York. Hilga always had reassured me, and given the opinion that Captain Bellaire would be found honest, but while on shipboard she proposed a stratagem to me."

"It was this: That when we landed we should exchange identities; that, for a few days, I should become Hilga, and she become Lenore Bellaire. My one fear was that, if my uncle meant me harm, he would seize the first chance to imprison me somewhere. Hilga argued that if he tried this she would be imprisoned, while I, the real Lenore, would be at liberty to see the officers of law and baffle him."

"This plan did not suit me, for I would rather meet danger, myself, than have Hilga put herself in peril for me, but she insisted that the plan be tried, reiterating that neither of us would be troubled; that my uncle would receive us kindly."

"At last I yielded, and when we went to Delancey street we played our false parts. Hilga introduced herself to the landlady as Lenore Bellaire, and introduced me as Hilga Ermstroff."

"That night I was taken ill, so ill that I desired a doctor; but Hilga insisted that she could relieve me. We had words on the subject, and, indignant that she should let me suffer, I tried to rise from the bed, but she pushed me back forcibly, and gave me another dose of what she said was medicine furnished by the landlady."

"Then sleep stole over me, and I knew no more."

The narrator put her hand to her head and frowned thoughtfully.

"All after this is vague," she went on. "I cannot have reason to believe I was no longer in my right mind. In fact, I know it, for what little I remember of the intervening events is only like the dim shape of detached dreams. I have vague recollections of callers whom I refused to see, I know not why; of night visits to the water-front at which I made for some reason I fail to grasp. I wonder at my own obliviousness to the danger I dared. But all this period and its events elude me when I try to think of it clearly."

"And Hilga Ermstroff?" Jim questioned.

"How do you account for her disappearance?"

"I don't know."

Lenore raised her hand and looked at it attentively.

"I had a ring, one I wore always and deeply cherished, because it had been my mother's. It is gone. How? Where? Did I lose it in my mental aberration, or did Hilga—"

She paused, and Jim finished for her, bluntly: "Rob you?"

"Hilga left me when I was ill, weak and beset with trouble. I wish to think well of her, but I ask myself: Were her motives really friendly when she suggested that we exchange identities? And I should like to know if Captain Bellaire has seen Hilga, or—any one claiming to be Lenore Bellaire!"

Jim and Raynor exchanged glances, but at that moment Peter Tiernan appeared, to say that sinners were outside who wanted to see the detective.

CHAPTER XVII.

SELF-CONDEMNED.

"GREAT yowlin' cats! ef I ain't struck a streak wit' pay-dirt, I'm a pestiferous Ananias!"

This was the exclamation which greeted Spotter Jim as he went out. It came from Bobby and Stumps. The latter was there, alert and excited, while by his side stood Stumps. The senior member of the Spotter Trio was calm, however.

"Have you a clew, Bobby?" Jim asked.

"Bet yer silk stockin's!"

"We have somethin' that ought ter be looked se it immitate," Stumps added. "Bobby is the one who found it, an' it's fer him ter tell the story. Proceed, Robert!"

"It's Hilga Ermstroff's diary," Bobby explained. "It kinder got inter my head that, in spite of all you had said, there might be tricks attend capers at Delancey street, an' two gals be versere instead o' one; so me and Mr. Stumps went

there. Wal, we didn't find nothin', an' I give up the two-gal theory; it's wrong. But when the landlady let us search the room, we did strike 'ile wonderful. This here is Hilga's diary, an' I've picked out a few daily records fer you ter peroose. Go in, Jeems. This first one is writ on the third day out of Calcutta, as Hilga an' Lenore came this way. Read!"

Jim read:

"Calm and beautiful weather. Our good ship cuts down the distance rapidly, and we shall soon be in New York. And then? Then Lenore will be a petted heiress, while I shall be—what? Just what I've always been; a beggar, beautiful, indolent, ambitious. I envy Lenore. Fate is seldom just; it is never kind to some. What if Lenore should die on the voyage? I should land in New York what I have just claimed to be, a beggar. And without her I should be friendless. Should I? Why need it be so? Captain Bellaire's agent missed the vessel at Calcutta; he will be several days, at the least, behind us. In the mean while what could I not do? Old Bellaire does not know how Lenore looks. Could I not go to him, say I was Lenore, get a few thousands in my fair white hands, and skip the town before my deceit was known? Would I were Lenore! Not being Lenore, would that I could step into her shoes!"

"Now, read this!" Bobby directed.

Again Jim Royal read.

"Another beautiful day. Nearer yet to New York. On we go—Lenore, the heiress-elect; Hilga, the beggar! Lenore! How I hate her! Why can't I be rich? But, it is impossible! She, poor fool! believes in me fully. She is shallow; I am deep. Have my wits become so dull that I cannot find a way to supplant her?"

"Try ag'in," Bobby advised.

The next extract was brief, but to the point:

"My plan takes shape. Having given her a plausible reason, Lenore has agreed that, for her safety (?), she and I will exchange identities for a few days after landing. I have the mind-destroying drug given me by the old East Indian at Hyderabad, before I ever saw Lenore. When I give a dose to Lenore, will it affect her as Myrpoo Hassa said: One dose, weakness of mind; two, imbecility; three, death. Let me remember that. Ah! I may yet be rich!"

"This one will close it up," pursued Bobby. "Some good things come in between, but you kin read them when you hev more time. This, you'll see, is the very last writin' in the book, an' was traced by Hilga at the Delancey street house. Read, J. Royal, read!"

And James read the last entry:

"The work is done, and well done. Old Myrpoo Hassa's drug is all he has claimed for it; Lenore is helpless. It made her ill bodily ere it affected her mind, and between her and the landlady I have been busy. I've given her only one dose. She will fully recover from it, if left alone. Whether I give her a second, or third, dose, will depend on what happens to-night."

"To-night! How much, how very much that means to me!"

"I have sent word to Captain Bellaire (signing myself Lenore Bellaire), and have his answer. This evening he will send his friend, Mr. Delno Wainbridge, to convey me in a carriage to his house. Shall I go? Verily, I shall—as Lenore! Once there, how soon can I gobble a few thousands from the old captain? It must be done quickly, for when the agent arrives from India it will become known that I am not Lenore. For a while I am safe; I even have on Lenore's dress and her ring."

"Victory! I will get all the cash I can, and then skip. As for Lenore, her future is not decided. If I can work the ropes properly, I'll let her live to enjoy what I can't purloin, but—how I've always hated her!—why couldn't I have had money, too?—but if my interests demand it, she will have to take the second, or third, dose of the East Indian's drug."

"A carriage stops at the door; it is my escort. Lo! I become Lenore, and go to grasp the Bellaire thousands! Sleep on, my mistress; you may, perhaps, take what I can't get. Yes; the man of the carriage has asked for Miss Bellaire. I go, to victory!"

It was the last entry in the book, and when it was read no questions were necessary. The diary told its own story.

Hilga Ermstroff, destitute of honor, and destitute of gratitude toward the mistress whose kindness of heart had made her a friend instead of a servant, had gone to pass herself off as Lenore, and had met, not with riches, but with her fate!

Lured to the East River pier, she had died there, and it was her body that had been found in the bay.

Again Peter Tiernan came to the Spotter Trio, this time from Barney McCurdy.

"Sure, the varmint says he's a-goin' ter die, an' that he see'd the ghost ave the drowned girl on the pier. I asked him how he knew, an' he tells me he was along on the vessel from Calcutta to New York, an' see Lenore well enough to be after knowin' her well by sight, an' that it

was her ghost he see whin Bobby turned on the light!"

The statement was true as far as Barney's knowledge went. He had made the trip to Calcutta, with the "agent," but when the latter missed the craft on the return, Barney had relapsed into a harmless passenger.

When Hilga, in trying to escape the gang after being lured to the pier, met her death, Barney had not seen her face, and supposed the real Lenore had been drowned. Hence, when he saw Lenore as the Angel of the Docks, all his superstitious fears had come to the front, and thus it was that he fell in the fit.

But Barney was not dying. A future was before him.

Meredith Raynor was talking with Lenore, but there was other work to be done by those who had ferreted out the mystery. Jim hired a cab, and, with Bobby for a companion, was soon on his way to Police Headquarters.

Once there his story was soon told, and measures taken to get warrants for the arrest of Wainbridge and Captain Bellaire.

That night they slept, if sleep they did, under lock and key, guarded by the police.

Lenore's recovery was rapid. The exact nature of the drug which Hilga had given her was not discovered, but Myrpoo Hassa, the old East Indian, had gauged its effects well. While its temporary power was strong it left no permanent harm, and its influence was fast passing away when the doctor took her in charge.

Memory never brought back the events of those days of mental darkness, but, as regarded her visits to the water-front, it was clear that, having once been guided there by Ira Ricketts, instinct had led her to go accurately on her later journey. Doubtless she took the very same route each time.

It was on her first visit, alone, that her cry had alarmed the Tiernans, and they had found her in a swoon. The face in the water she claimed to have seen that night was doubtless wholly imaginary, while her erratic talk, in which she asserted she had been drowned, herself, was only a mental vagary.

As for the motive of her visits to the pier, no realizing sense of the tragedy described by Ricketts had ever come to her, but enough of an impression had been made to send her there each night.

That the landlady did not know she went out was not strange, for she left at a somewhat late hour, and very quietly, according to her custom.

She was able to recognize the body of the drowned girl fully as Hilga, but the shock of the tragic end of her once-supposed friend was softened by the latter's own words in the diary, where she so plainly, relentlessly announced her purpose to rob, perhaps to murder Lenore.

The foiled schemer was respectfully buried, and there her history ended.

Captain Bellaire, Wainbridge and McCurdy were duly tried and convicted. As no premeditation to commit the crime of the pier could be proven, they escaped the death-penalty, but each received a long sentence.

When Stumps saw McCurdy he recognized him as the man who had followed him home the night he was assaulted in his room, and Barney finally confessed that attempted crime.

Ira Ricketts was used as a witness for the people and allowed to go free. He is leading an honest life.

The Tiernans are prosperous and happy, and when Lenore visits them, as she often does, cannot quite get rid of the impression that she who was once the Angel of the Docks is a little more than human.

Jim Royal had surmised correctly on one point, and the fact was established when Lenore became Mrs. Meredith Raynor.

It was found that the Western land, purchased a score of years before by Harper Bellaire really had become very valuable; that it was because of this her uncle had plotted against her, as he unjustly held her share; that he had deliberately left his brother and family on the ocean island to get the property; and Lenore now received her own and was wealthy.

And the Spotter Trio?

They are still in harness. Resolute Jim, sober Stumps and volatile Bobby received great glory from their work, and good pay, too. Not strange, then, that they sought fresh fields for the exercise of their peculiar gifts as spotter-detectives.

THE END.

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